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LETTERS

ON

THE RELIGIOUS REVIVALS

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WHICH

PREVAILED ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF THE  
PRESENT CENTURY.

BY

E. PORTER, D. D.,

LATE PROFESSOR IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

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## P R E F A C E .

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THE following letters were addressed to the Revival Association in the Theological Seminary, Andover, in A. D. 1832. "This Revival Association was organized for the purpose of collecting information upon the subject of revivals. And it designed to accomplish this, in part, by procuring a series of essays for publication upon practical subjects connected with them." By the request of this Association, their distinguished professor in the Seminary, the lamented Dr. Porter, prepared these letters, which were published in the Spirit of the Pilgrims, and were, at the time, received with great favor by all the friends of revivals. The ability and piety of Dr. Porter, and his extensive and experimental acquaintance with revivals, marked him as the man eminently qualified to give instruction and facts on the subject. This he has done so happily and with such ability, as to make these letters of permanent value. They contain statements, examples, and instructions equally applicable now as when first published, and

will be very appropriate and useful in all seasons of religious interest. The name of the author is a sufficient guaranty of their value, and renders any further commendation superfluous.

The Congregational Board of Publication regard these letters as worthy of being perpetuated, and they now issue this edition with the confident hope of its great usefulness, especially in this time of extensive revivals of religion throughout the country.

BOSTON, July, 1858.

# LETTERS ON REVIVALS.

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## LETTER I.

TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE REVIVAL ASSOCIATION IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, ANDOVER.

GENTLEMEN, — Your request that I would give you my remarks “*On the religious revivals which prevailed about the beginning of this century,*” was received some time ago, but indispensable engagements have prevented an earlier attention to the subject. When the plan of forming a society in the Seminary, with a special view to revivals, was first mentioned to me, more than a year since, I welcomed it as probably a suggestion from Heaven; and it is still my prayer and hope, that it may deserve hereafter to be ranked with kindred movements of this wonderful day, which we have seen growing from small beginnings into an importance surpassing the most sanguine calculations.

When I look upon the condition of this world, lost beyond all hope, except from the redeeming in-

fluence of the gospel; when I look at the accumulated evidence, from the Bible and from experience, that the human heart is utterly alienated from God, and the race who he formed in his own image are combined in hostility against his throne; and when I consider the evidence, too, that the gospel, with all its motives to holiness, is itself inadequate, without special divine influence upon the heart, to subdue this hostility in any sinner; I see the cause of human salvation to be altogether desperate, without the interposition of the Holy Spirit. Aside from this, there is a deplorable certainty that no one of our race would ever cordially submit to God.

For the same reason should this interposition be granted only to one individual in ten (which has been, perhaps, about the average of saving conversions in our evangelical congregations), nine tenths of the population, even in New England, would remain "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." Darker still is the prospect in those sections of our country where scarcely one in fifty exhibits any evidence, or makes any profession, of piety. The hope of the church, then, is in revivals of religion — continued, powerful, general revivals. With no greater degrees of sanctifying influence than have been enjoyed during the last half century, which has been comparatively a favored period, the church could

scarcely hold her own. The flood of ungodliness, which has been aiming to sweep away her Sabbaths, and blot out her memorial from under heaven, would swell and rage with a more portentous violence. Indeed the best hope, I might say the only hope, of the intelligent Christian patriot, that the civil institutions of our country will be perpetuated, depends on the extent to which vital and experimental religion shall prevail among its inhabitants, through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Entertaining these views, I have deemed it all important that ministers, and those who are preparing to become ministers, should be revival men; I mean, men who understand the subject of revivals, who enter into it with a warm and decided interest, and whose preaching and influence in all respects shall be adapted to promote revivals. To cherish the spirit of revivals, then, in our Theological Seminaries, is the direct way to multiply revival ministers; and perhaps no better plan, could be devised for cultivating this spirit, than by an association expressly devoted to this object, such as you have organized among yourselves during the past year. This will lead all the members of the Seminary to read and think more on the special work of the Holy Spirit than they would otherwise do. It will bring up to view at your regular meetings the history of

revivals at different periods, in this country and in others; the means most successfully employed,—the spirit of the men and of the preaching most signally blessed at such seasons. It will make you familiar with those methods which experience has approved in treating the careless, the anxious, and the hopeful subjects of renewing grace, and the mistakes to be avoided in regard to these several classes.

Now the tendency, among those who are destined to the sacred office, of habitual reflection and conversation on this wide range of subjects, belonging to the head of experimental religion, is to promote their own personal piety. The same divine influence which the Christian student feels to be necessary for the salvation of other men, he will deeply feel to be necessary to sanctify his own heart, as well as to prepare him for the sacred work of feeding Christ's sheep and his lambs. This will impart a spirituality and devotion to his motives as a student, without which no strength of talent, no fund of literary acquisition, can qualify him for his great business. Of course, so far as he becomes a revival man, he will be guarded against that liability to be satisfied with an intellectual religion to which literary men are always exposed. Should the Revival Association, as I trust it will, in connection with other devotional

exercises, contribute an important influence to render our students warm-hearted Christians, it will directly promote the great purposes for which the Seminary was established.

In compliance with your wishes, the period of revivals on which I shall now remark is that including the two closing years of the last century, and extending into the present, so as to make about ten years in all. The review of this period is attended with circumstances of special interest to my own feelings, having then recently entered the ministry myself, and being allowed to share in the labors of that blessed season, and to witness its scenes of wonder and mercy among my own people. Instead of relying, however, on my own recollections, I have carefully examined the very ample narratives of those revivals written at the time, and occupying a considerable part of nine or ten volumes of the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, besides other periodicals and documents of the day.

These narratives were written chiefly by ministers, most of whom I personally knew;—many of them my fathers in the sacred office, whom I regarded then, as I do now, with sincere respect and veneration. Many of them were among the most intelligent and able men of their time; and all of them were as competent as any other men to tell what

they witnessed from day to day, among their own hearers and others around them.

These narratives, too, were written with leisure and deliberation, after the excitement connected with such scenes of thrilling interest had subsided. Generally they were written two or three years, in a few cases four years, after the revivals respectively were at their height, but rarely within the first year. Some importance will be attached to this fact in the sequel. These papers differ in length, from two or three to twenty or thirty close octavo pages; prepared with evident marks of candor and care, with great simplicity, and with a uniformity of statement truly remarkable as to the main characteristics of the work which they record.

The congregations to which they specially relate are one hundred and seventeen in number; while some of them, after describing a revival in one place, incidentally mention a similar state of things in a whole section of country, — one says fifty-five or sixty adjacent towns. Great numbers of the places thus mercifully visited were never individually reported in the published narratives. No part of the country, in proportion to its extent, shared so largely in these "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," as Connecticut; but other parts of New England enjoyed precious showers of grace; and during the



same period powerful revivals prevailed, more or less extensively, in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, the two Carolinas, and Georgia. In no single town, perhaps, was the work so signally powerful as it was in Northampton, near a century ago, in what has been called by aged people, "the great awakening;" but in the general amount of sanctifying influence, it surpassed all other experience of the American churches, before or since, unless we are to except the ever memorable experience of 1831, which we devoutly hope may stand on record as ushering in an era of mercy to our Zion hitherto without a parallel.

One circumstance in this connection deserves a brief notice, as to past seasons of revival. I have often seen the remark, that no such seasons were enjoyed for about fifty years after the great revivals, in the time of Whitefield and the Tennants; but in examining the documents on which I am now to remark, I perceive, in a number of them, by way of retrospective glance at the history of the churches to which they refer, distinct mention of considerable revivals between 1765 and 1795. Thus the Rev. Ammi R. Robbins of Norfolk, Conn., mentions a work of grace among that people in 1767, in which "the whole town were awed with the presence of the Lord." And in 1783 he describes "a second glo-

rious day of grace," in which fifty were added to the church. Other accounts make similar statements respecting Killingly and Lebanon, Conn., Lebanon, N. Y., Stockbridge, New Marlborough, and other towns in Berkshire, Mass. The years designated are 1773, 1776, 1781, 1782, 1783, 1785, and 1788.

The almost entire cessation of revivals for twenty-five years, and their comparative infrequency for twenty-five more, after the powerful revivals of 1740, I have often heard aged ministers ascribe chiefly to two causes: first, the great disorders which became mingled in various forms of fanatical excitement with the genuine and glorious work of the Holy Spirit, and which produced a deadly reaction upon the churches; and secondly, the political asperities betwixt the colonies and the mother country, which kept all the bad passions in feverish agitation, till they exploded in the war of the Revolution. The distress and the perplexity which that war brought in its train, and the scenes of awful and universal interest which followed, during the formation of new governments for the nation and the several States, did much towards destroying the sanctity of the Sabbath, and prostrating the barriers which the fathers of New England had erected to guard the public morals. The religious instruction of children and youth became an object of much less attention

than it had formerly been ; and this neglect of God's own appointed means stood in obvious connection with the decline of piety in the churches.

But to return to the glorious period of revivals which I have undertaken to describe, beginning with the year 1798, and extending into the present century ; a few general facts attending those seasons of grace can be stated briefly, to which I shall here give a prominent place, referring to them afterwards, as occasion may require. One of these facts is, that the hopeful subjects of conversion were, to a great extent, the children of religious parents. One of the narratives says, that nine tenths of the whole, who apparently became pious, had been dedicated to God in baptism, one parent or both belonging to the church. Another estimates the proportion at three fourths. In some cases it was considerably less ; but generally, I presume, the average number was not far from two thirds.

The proportion of males to females, as subjects of the work in different places, was somewhat various, but amounted, so far as I can ascertain, to nearly two thirds of females. Without stopping to remark here on so great a disparity in the religious character of the sexes, I presume the fact accords with the general experience of the church. President Edwards, speaking of those of whom he hoped were

savingly renewed, said, "There was about the same number of males as females; which, by what I have heard Mr. Stoddard say, was far from what has been usual in years past; for he observed, that, in his time, many more women were converted than men."

In respect to age, the subjects of these revivals were generally in early and middle life; a small proportion are mentioned as having been subdued by sovereign grace in advanced years; and a few rare cases in extreme old age. On the contrary, very young children were often deeply impressed, and in many instances continued to give evidence of a saving change of heart. The scholars of district schools sometimes begged of their teachers the privilege of reading the Bible, instead of their customary lessons, and made a voluntary exchange of their favorite amusements, during intermissions, for prayer and other religious exercises.

The commencement of these revivals was, in some cases, attended with overwhelming power. The following statement from Rev. Dr. Griffin respects the people of his charge in Newark, N. J., and illustrates, in a touching manner, the foregoing particular, as well as this. Concerning the beginning of the work in that place, he says: "The appearance was as if a collection of waters, long suspended over the town, had fallen at once, and deluged the whole

place. For several weeks the people would stay at the close of every evening service to hear some new exhortation; and it seemed impossible to persuade them to depart, until those on whose lips they hung had retired. At those seasons, you might see a multitude weeping and trembling around their minister, and many others standing as astonished spectators of the scene, and beginning to tremble themselves. One Sabbath, after the second service, when I had catechized and dismissed the little children, they gathered around me, weeping, and inquiring what they should do. I know not but an hundred were in tears at once. The scene was as affecting as it was unexpected. Having prayed with them again, and spent some time in exhortation, I attempted to send them away, but with all my entreaties I could not prevail on them to depart until night came on, and then I was obliged to go out with them, and literally force them from me. But this excitement of animal feelings, incident to the commencement of revivals of religion, soon subsided, and the work has ever since proceeded in profound silence."

The Rev. Dr. Cooley, describing a similar work in Granville, Mass., says: "It spread with surprising rapidity through the parish. Christians were animated, sinners were awakened, scoffers were struck

silent, at the powerful work of the Almighty. I shall give the reader but an imperfect idea of that surprising change from apparent thoughtlessness to universal alarm, which took place in two or three weeks." So in Rupert, Vt., a revival in 1804 is thus described, as to its commencement: "On a sudden, the Spirit of the Lord appeared to come down upon us, like a rushing, mighty wind. Almost the whole place was shaken at once; scarcely was there a family in which some were not earnestly inquiring what they should do to be saved; and scarcely a countenance without evident marks of solemnity."

But I must not be understood to say, that these revivals were generally either sudden or universal, in the places where they existed. Often they resembled the still, small voice, rather than the wind which rent the mountains, and broke the rocks in pieces. Often they were gradual as well as gentle. A single youth, perhaps, smitten with an arrow from the quiver of the Almighty, writhed in secret under a wounded spirit, till a brother or sister was smitten also;—then religion became a solemn concern to a family, then to a neighborhood, and finally, perhaps, to a large congregation.

The continuance of this work was commonly short, in those cases where its commencement was rapid

and overwhelming. In many instances, less promising at first, there was a gradual progress for three, six, and even eighteen months, before any visible decline; and in some of these, a steady current of divine influence, rising and swelling, amid continued showers of heaven, bore down all opposition. The churches which were visited with these more protracted seasons of mercy generally, perhaps, received the most solid accession to their strength, if not in numbers, at least in the intelligent, shining, enduring piety of those who were added to their communion. It ought to be observed, that, while in some places divine influence was continued, for several years, like the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion, in others there was an apparent suspension and renewal of such influence, resembling successive revivals, several times in the same year.

The number of hopeful conversions within the period to which I refer, cannot be determined. In Newark, N. J., during this period, there were two revivals, in the first of which 130 were reckoned as having passed from death to life; and in the second, 240. I recollect no other place in which the number was so great as in this; but hundreds of churches, some of them with an ample list of communicants slumbering together, and others sunk to the verge of extinction, were renovated in that blessed season,

and went onward, shouting the triumphs of their Redeemer.

I am now prepared to enter more fully into a statement of facts developing the character of these revivals; and this I choose to do in the following method;— *Means employed to promote revivals*;— *Hindrances to their prosperity*;— *Exercises of sinners under legal convictions*;— *Exercises of hopeful converts*, including their views of themselves, of God, and the way of salvation— with their sources and degrees of religious enjoyment;— *Treatment, by ministers and Christians, of those who entertained hopes* as to the time and manner of announcing their supposed change, and encouraging their early profession of religion;— *General Results* of these revivals;— *Influence on Ministers*, in promoting their humility, and fidelity, and unity of affection among themselves;— *Influence on churches*, in promoting harmony of doctrinal views, Christian zeal, and an elevated standard of experimental and practical religion. This detail of facts will be followed, if God permit, with some reflections adapted to the present state of our churches.

The subject will be resumed at a convenient opportunity.



## LETTER II.

GENTLEMEN, — According to my promise, I now proceed with a more particular account of the revivals which prevailed about the beginning of this century. There was but one sentiment among the ministers of those times respecting the indispensable importance of using means for the conversion of sinners; though it was often said, by cavillers against the Calvinistic doctrines, that these rendered means altogether useless. To such cavillers it was customary to reply in the following manner: “The natural and moral worlds present before us a universe of means. The God of this universe is not dependent on instruments. He was able to divide the sea, or bring water from the rock of flint, without the rod of Moses; able to heal a leprous man, without the waters of Jordan; or a blind man, without the aid of clay. He could fill the world with Bibles by a word, — or give every inhabitant of the globe a knowledge of the gospel by inspiration. But he chooses that human agency should be em-

ployed in printing and reading and explaining the Scriptures. God is able to sanctify the four hundred millions of Asia, in one instant, without the agency of missionaries; but we do not expect him to do this without means, any more than we expect him to rain down food from the clouds, or turn stones into bread."

With such views as to the importance of means, the ministers of that time were agreed, I presume, in the following points: — that means have no independent efficacy to renew the hearts of men; that the unholy man, while God is using means with him, does nothing which God accepts as holy obedience; that he does not gradually become holy, by the influence of means, — regeneration being an instantaneous and not a progressive work; that this renovation is not produced by any direct instrumentality of means, it being a supernatural work, not effected, like ordinary events, by the laws of nature. The old doctrine of regeneration by light or by moral suasion was universally rejected by those revival preachers, as implying that the depravity of sinners is no fault of their hearts, but merely a mistake respecting God and his law, which instruction and motives will rectify.

If it be inquired why those preachers regarded the use of means with the impenitent sinner as indis-

pensable, I answer, — because God has appointed them to be thus used; because the intellect of the sinner, not being the seat of depravity, his reason, memory, conscience, &c. are directly accessible by means; because, of course, he may be instructed in religion, and, while his heart is still unsanctified, he may make great attainments in doctrinal knowledge, and have deep and solemn conviction of the truth. All this, according to the most usual operation of the Holy Spirit, is prerequisite to the conversion of a sinner; so that we do not scruple to say of any one who remains altogether uninstructed and uninterested on the subject of religion, that there is no present prospect of his salvation.

Besides, in respect to what follows regeneration as well as what precedes it, means are necessary. God is a God of order. Should he renovate the heart of a heathen who had received no knowledge of the gospel, that heathen could not exercise the Christian graces till he had been instructed in the truth. God surrounds the blind sinner with light, not because light has any inherent efficacy to cure blindness, but because light is essential to vision after blindness is removed.

But among the ministers to whom I have referred, what means were deemed most important, in promoting revivals of religion? To this I answer, that

the first place, in point of importance, was assigned to the preaching of the gospel. That this ought to be regarded as the prime instrument which God has chosen for the conversion of sinners is evident from the example of Christ in his own ministry; from his commission to the Apostles, and their example in executing that commission; and from the universal experience of the church.

Besides the two sermons which ordinarily were delivered in each pulpit on the Sabbath, a third was very common during a time of revival. On week-days, too, with more or less of regularity, according to the state of a congregation, lectures were attended. For example, in some cases, the pastors of two adjacent churches or more preached at occasional meetings, attended successively within each other's limits, at the church or at more private places. In other instances, two ministers visited five or six towns in the same vicinity during the same week, preaching in each congregation several sermons. The time of their coming was announced beforehand, as the occasion of special prayer on the part of the church to be visited. The sermons delivered in this manner were generally attended with a manifest blessing from heaven; sometimes the effect was immediate and remarkably powerful. I can never forget an interesting meeting of about ten ministers,

at my house, in which, after the lamentable fact had been ascertained that no one of the number could mention a single revival of religion as then existing in any part of our country; the resolution was taken, after a solemn season of prayer, to renew the system of preaching, by two and two, in the manner above mentioned. These efforts were followed at once by a shower of divine influence on the congregations where they were employed; and the work of grace became extensive over that part of Connecticut.

In some cases a people among whom a revival was in progress were visited by perhaps two ministers, from the distance of thirty or fifty miles, who continued their visit for a week or more, preaching two or three times in a day to crowded assemblies. Such a visit was made to the people of my charge, in the revival of 1805, by Rev. Messrs. Mills and Hallock, whose labors on that occasion were greatly blessed. A letter of Judge Boudinot, describing the revival in Newark under the ministry of Dr. Griffin, says, that during that season he preached seven times in a week, including the sermons of the Sabbath. And in the revival of the same year among the people of Dr. Strong of Hartford, six sermons a week, besides the Sabbath, were preached, chiefly by the two Congregational ministers of the city.

At this period, one instance is mentioned of what is now called a "protracted meeting," of two days' continuance, holden at Rupert, Vt. Five sermons were preached, besides many exhortations and prayers. About three thousand persons were present, and the exercises were attended with evident manifestations of divine power. The scene closed with the administration of the Lord's supper to about eight hundred communicants. This seems to have been a season of refreshing to the people of God, and of solemn conviction to others, many of whom, from neighboring towns, "smote on their breasts, and returned with a wounded spirit."

But you will probably ask, for it is reasonable that you should,—how did ministers preach at that period, as to spirit, manner, sentiment, &c. To this inquiry I answer generally, that the prevalent strain of preaching was essentially the same as that of the Puritan Fathers in this country, and of the English dissenting preachers of the 17th century. I say *essentially*, for in the circumstantial of preaching there was certainly considerable difference. The two individuals who had a primary influence in giving to the New England pulpit the character which it retained to the period of which I am speaking, were President Edwards and Dr. Bellamy. Under the direct instruction of those luminaries,

especially the latter, many of the elder ministers who were prominent on the stage at the close of the last century were trained for the sacred office. A considerable number of those who were active pastors in the revivals of 1800, &c., studied theology with Dr. Bellamy; and some of these were teachers of theological students in their own time. After the triumphant conflict of Edwards and his associates with the Arminianism of that day had subsided, an almost perfect unanimity of views on doctrinal and experimental religion prevailed among those ministers of New England who had any pretensions to personal piety. Accordingly, there was a greater uniformity in the character of preaching for some time at this period, than perhaps at any other since the first years of the New England churches. This uniformity, indeed, did not supersede that variety which always marks the intellectual efforts of different men, according to the taste, talent, and temperament of individuals.

A few ministers customarily preached from short notes, or with a mere skeleton of their subject, sketched on paper; and I recollect one at least who preached in this manner with great effect. But sermons were generally written; were rarely less than thirty or more than forty minutes long; and were delivered not from memory, but from the man-

uscript; and this was often a process of reading so closely as much to impair the elocution of the preacher. Especially was this the case when the sermon was written in a hand so small and abbreviated that he must stoop over the cushion to read it, or employ his hands in holding it up before his face. All these difficulties were aggravated by a little decay of the preacher's sight, which rendered the manuscript worse than useless.

This is not the place to discuss the question, whether the habit of writing out sermons has been carried to an extreme. But of the two eminent men named above, while the mere manner of President Edwards was far less popular and impressive than that of Dr. Bellamy, his influence on the New England pulpit has been far greater in amount than that of the latter, who published almost no sermons, and left none that could be published after his death.

The general characteristics of sermons, at the period I am reviewing, were the following;—they were decidedly *evangelical*,—Christ crucified being kept prominent in every pulpit where the spirit of revivals prevailed. They were *methodical*,—often, indeed, the scholastic mode of division was carried to an extreme, in mechanical uniformity, and multiplication of heads. They were *biblical*,—the word of God being made the grand source of argument



and illustration. To a good degree they were *fervent* and *pungent*,—often making solemn appeals to conscience; and, to a still higher degree, they were *instructive*. It scarcely need to be said, that, in point of style, the preachers of that day were *plain*; with little pretension to elegance of diction, and scarcely any regard to the requisitions of taste, beyond simplicity and perspicuity. They commonly spoke a language easy to be understood, but often very defective in classical purity and precision, in choice of words and lucid arrangement. In these respects, there has been a most obvious improvement in the style of the pulpit within twenty-five years; as there has also been in the freedom with which sermons are delivered, instead of that rigid confinement to notes which formerly prevailed. How far the influence of theological seminaries has contributed to these changes, others can judge as well as myself.

I said that the sermons to which I have alluded were *instructive*; but I do not mean that they were written in a strain of metaphysical, nor of merely didactic, discussion. Generally, the preacher aimed to spread before his hearers some important evangelical subject,—and to do this in a method and style so lucid as to be understood. He aimed also, unless greatly wanting in skill, to exhibit divine truth in its

connections, and in its practical bearing on the heart and life. In other words, the prevalent strain of preaching was doctrino-practical. It successfully inculcated the moral duties of Christianity, by giving prominence to its cardinal truths; and thus kept on the high road of apostolic precedent, between the precincts of a sterile, heartless morality on one hand, and of a useless speculation on the other.

I am aware that you may wish to be informed more particularly what were the doctrines which those ministers preached, and which God was pleased so signally to bless, for the conviction and conversion of sinners. This inquiry I might best answer by extracts from the printed narratives of revivals; but there is room only for a specimen or two. One of these narratives says,—

“The soul-humblng doctrines of our Saviour,—which exalt God and stain the pride of human glory, have been made use of in carrying on this work. The holiness, extent, and inflexibility of the moral law,—our depravity, and dependence on God,—his sovereignty and universal government,—the special agency of the Holy Spirit,—and mere grace through Christ, the only ground of pardon;—these truths have proved like the fire and hammer that break the rock in pieces. Often, indeed, they were opposed at first by awakened sinners, who afterwards came, on full conviction, to regard them as their only hope. To the people generally, the most plain, pungent preaching, and the most thorough experimental preachers, have been most acceptable.”

Another faithful and able preacher, who was accustomed to teach awakened sinners that the only reason of their not finding relief was the stubbornness of their own hearts; according to the words of Christ, "Ye will not come to me that ye may have life," says —

"No preaching seems so effectual to drive them from their hiding-places, as to tell them plainly, that they are eternally undone, if the unpromised mercy of God is not displayed in their favor; that they have not the least claim on God, and if he does not have mercy they are gone forever."

The experience of these ministers as to the most successful mode of preaching, corresponded with the following statement of President Edwards respecting the great revivals among his own people.

"No discourses have been more remarkably blessed than those in which the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his just liberty, with regard to answering the prayers, or succeeding the pains of mere natural men, continuing such, have been insisted on. I never found so much immediate, saving fruit, in any measure, of any discourses I have offered to my congregation, as some from those words. Rom. 3: 19; 'That every mouth may be stopped;' endeavoring to show from thence that it would be just with God forever to reject and cast off mere natural man."

In this connection I ought to state explicitly a

concurrent and nearly universal sentiment of the pastors who were most instrumental of revivals, that the doctrine of election is the only adequate ground of encouragement in preaching the gospel. They reasoned thus : "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Sinners, left to themselves, without special, divine influence, will never repent. The best means in themselves are utterly ineffectual, and, without the Holy Spirit, will bring no one to comply with the terms of the gospel. Were it not revealed, then, that God has determined to render his truth efficacious in bringing some to faith and holiness, every minister who believes the Bible would see no encouragement to preach the gospel, and every sinner who understands his own depravity would be in total despair.

But I ought to state with equal distinctness, that these preachers did not restrict themselves to the doctrine of election, nor to any one doctrine of revelation; for it was their object to "declare the whole counsel of God." While, in one form and another, they often and very distinctly brought into view the discriminating grace of God, this was made the entire subject of a discourse no more frequently than other kindred truths. Thus, the entire alienation of the sinner's heart from God; his voluntary, inexcusable, and yet certain rejection

of the gospel, till his heart is subdued by divine influence; his complete obligation, as a moral agent, to repent and do all that God requires of him, and to do it immediately; his need of an infinite Saviour to make atonement for him and an infinite Sanctifier to renovate him, and take away his only obstacle to obedience, the guilty opposition of his heart; and his dependence on free grace through faith to justify and save him,—were truths constantly inculcated in the pulpit.

I never expect to hear more pungent and awful appeals to conscience than I sometimes heard from those revival preachers, — who arrayed before their hearers the solemnities of a coming eternity, and told them their duty to love God supremely and immediately; told them, too, their awful enmity to God, for which they deserved his endless wrath, — and finally told them, that nothing could save them from this wrath but the blood of Christ applied to their souls by the washing of regeneration, and this by the mere “mercy of God.”

The distinction between natural and moral inability was taught from the pulpit of that day, just as it is taught by the Bible and common sense. Men were represented as guilty; — Why? Not because they could not repent if they would; but because, with perfect powers of moral agency, they refuse to

do their duty. The truth on this subject was deemed too plain to require formal proof in sermons, though it was often exhibited by way of illustration. An example of this kind is still fresh in my recollection, from a discourse of Rev. S. J. Mills on repentance. Having impressed on his hearers, with great solemnity, the truth that all who remain impenitent under the gospel for a single moment are without excuse, he paused near the close of his discourse, and said: "Probably some of my hearers are disposed to reply, 'No, we are not without excuse. We cannot repent. God tells us that we cannot; and ministers tell us that we cannot; why then are we called upon to do it?' I will suppose," said he, "that this house is a fortification, and we are the garrison. A powerful army comes and surrounds us and hems us in, so that all supplies from abroad, and all hopes of retreat, are cut off. They send a flag, and summon us to surrender. We call a council of war, and deliberate. What is to be done? The case is clearly a desperate one; no escape is possible, no resistance, no compromise. We send back for answer,— We should rejoice with all our heart to surrender, but we are not able. Now, who ever heard of such a dilemma? Many a garrison has been unable to stand out and resist; but who ever heard of one that had not power to surrender!"

I have seen sinners in those assemblies agitated with awful anxiety, and crushed down with conviction of their guilt, under the pressure of two truths; one, that heaven is now offered to their acceptance as a free gift, and that they have no excuse for remaining impenitent a single moment; the other, that their hearts are so deeply wicked that their only hope is in the sovereign mercy of God.

I have dwelt so long on preaching, that I must touch very briefly on several other means, which were instrumental of producing or prolonging the revivals of that day.

The most common among these were religious conferences. The exercises at these meetings consisted of prayers, singing of hymns, reading parts of sermons, extracts from magazines, &c., exhortations, and free conversation on religious subjects. In some cases the pastor made these meetings the occasion for discussing important Christian doctrines; and the more intelligent of a congregation attended them for years, as a school of improvement in religious knowledge. In the devotional exercises on these occasions, lay brethren were usually called on to take a part, and also in free discussion of religious subjects, when they were qualified to do it with judgment. I have before me several lists of subjects discussed at such meetings, which must have been

admirably adapted to promote knowledge and piety in a congregation. Indeed it seems to have been a cardinal maxim in these revivals, that nothing effectual is accomplished, unless the people are thoroughly instructed in the great truths of the gospel.

In a multitude of cases, where the spirit of God had come down with special power, conferences were crowded, so that there was not room for the people, "even about the doors." Obstacles to attendance from storms and cold were easily surmounted, so that the usual gathering was scarcely diminished by violent weather; nor did very frequent attendance on such meetings prove a hindrance to success in the ordinary business of life.

Prayer-meetings, in which the exercises were almost wholly devotional, were often found more directly conducive to the spirit of revivals than conferences. Their whole purpose and tendency was to humble Christians, and lead them to look away from every other reliance to God alone. In this view, prayer is not so much one particular among a system of means, as it is the soul and substance of all; namely, that laying hold on eternal strength, without which all human instrumentality is vain.

On the common prayer-meetings of that day you



will need no remarks, being familiar now with those of the same character. *Special* prayer-meetings derived their chief interest and efficacy from occasions and circumstances. When a church, mourning the absence of divine influence, was brought to bow down before God, with fasting and sackcloth and supplication, then was there reason to hope that deliverance was at hand. I say with fasting; for, lightly as this religious ordinance is regarded by many, experience demonstrates its adaptedness to give intensity to special prayer.

About 1795, a *quarterly concert* of prayer, originating, I believe, in New Jersey, began to be observed by a number of churches in Connecticut. It never became general, and lasted but a few years. At a later period, a *family concert* was adopted somewhat extensively, and attended weekly, from September to March, on Saturday evening, the hour after sunsetting; and from March to September, on Sabbath evening, the hour before sunsetting. And later still, the circle of churches with which I was connected, to the number of fifteen or twenty, observed a *sacramental concert*, which returned with the regular seasons of preparation for the Lord's Supper. Then these churches met at the same hour, each in its own sanctuary; and after a sermon, or other solemn service appropriate to the com-

munion, the children of the church, who had been dedicated to God in baptism, and who were brought together at the time, were commended to the divine blessing by the united prayers of the whole church. These were among the most solemn, delightful, profitable prayer-meetings I ever witnessed. They were a practical commentary on the significance of household dedication to God.

At this period commenced, as I suppose, the *female prayer-meetings*, which are now so common, and which have been attended with most important results to the church. I shall be understood, of course, as referring to societies of pious women, whose meetings were restricted to their own sex, and not to such gross irregularities as have been encouraged of late (though encouraged, as I presume, in but few places), where females pray and exhort in mixed assemblies.

These meetings for prayer, in all the forms above mentioned, were adapted to inspire Christians with that spirit which father Mills so often enjoined, "Let us live, looking upwards." There was one more kind of special prayer-meeting, which I will describe only by an extract from the narrative of the revival at Newark.

"A society was formed, to meet at nine o'clock on Sabbath morning, and spend an hour, previous to engaging in public

worship, in prayer to God for his blessing on the word. They styled themselves the Aaron and Hur Society, as supporting the hands of their minister. The second Sabbath, the numbers were doubled; and the third, the school-house in which they assembled was crowded, and has continued so since; besides others in different parts of the village. It was not long before the blessed work pervaded every part of the society."

Just such a Sabbath morning meeting was attended by the church of which I was pastor; and the practice I suppose to have been somewhat extensive amid the prevalence of revivals; and certainly with a direct tendency to promote their prevalence.

I can only add, in the briefest manner, that among the interesting facts which have strongly impressed my own mind, in reviewing the printed sketches of these revivals, this is one; the special outpourings of the Spirit often began in obvious connection with some new efforts of a church for the spiritual good of children and youth. This is another, — that these seasons of mercy, in repeated instances, followed the faithful exercise of discipline, by which a church promptly cut off from her communion some incorrigible offender against the laws of Christ.

### LETTER III.

GENTLEMEN,—I will proceed now to some remarks on the *hindrances* of revivals. It cannot be doubted, that there is sometimes a sovereign withdrawal of divine influence from a church, when no special reason is apparent to us why it should be so, at that time, rather than another. But I have reference now to those hindrances of revivals which may be traced to *something wrong in the church*. And in addressing you who expect to be ministers, and whose daily prayer to God, I doubt not, is, that he will qualify you to be skilful and successful ministers, you will see the propriety of my glancing briefly, though with great frankness, at some of the ways in which the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of men may be obstructed by their spiritual guides.

You are aware that there are men, even in the sacred office, so constitutionally indiscreet, that, in whatever they undertake, they will choose the wrong way, if there is one. You are aware, too,

that, notwithstanding the charge which Paul gave Timothy in most emphatic terms, that a bishop should not be "a novice" (literally an infant), there always have been individuals rushing into this office, who are lamentably deficient both in native and acquired powers for the discharge of its duties. An illiterate man, if he have good sense and true humility, may do good in revivals; but if he is proud and rash and censorious, as well as ignorant, he will probably do much more hurt than good, especially by revolting the sensibilities of intelligent men, who think that religion should promote sobriety, decorum, and amiable temper in its subjects. The ministers with whom I was associated in the revivals of 1800, &c., were, nearly without exception, educated men, who were preserved from the most common mistakes of ignorance and fanaticism. But theological knowledge and skill in winning souls to Christ, they possessed in very different degrees. Without exception too, perhaps, they were pious men, but with very different degrees of piety, so far as this was evinced by fervor of Christian spirit and unre-served devotedness to their work. I can recollect more instances than one within the compass of my observation, where a congregation, amid surrounding showers of divine influence, were passed by; and, if I had been called to give the reason, I must have

said frankly, the pastor is the greatest obstacle to a revival among his people. And this might have been truly said of him, though he was not chargeable with any heresy, or immorality, or hostility to revivals. But how can this be? It can be in various ways.

A—— was one of those good men who were under the dominion of a sluggish temperament. To him the maxim, “Expect great things, attempt great things,” however proper in secular enterprises, seemed little short of presumption, as applied to the ministry. Effort, beyond the most obvious claims of official duty, he dreaded. To travel from one side of his parish to another, especially to travel half way across a county, to attend a meeting of ministers or churches, cost him as much self-denial as it cost Cæsar to cross the Alps and subdue a kingdom. In fulfilling his pastoral appointments, he was always behind the time, he always made on his hearers the impression of languor and inefficiency in his movements, and imparted to them too much of his own spirit. No revival, or none of much power and extent, was witnessed in his congregation.

B—— was a man of literary taste, an idolater of books. He was so fond of reading, especially works of genius and popular literature, that the spirituality of his heart was gradually impaired; he laid down

his favorite authors with reluctance, to attend a prayer-meeting;—went, to fulfil an engagement, with little of pastoral feeling; and, returning to his study, became absorbed in his intellectual pursuits, instead of his appropriate work, as one appointed to “watch for souls.” Rare instances of conversion, but no revival, occurred under his ministry.

C—— was fond of social avocations. Lively in temper, he easily persuaded himself that both his health and usefulness would be promoted by associating with cheerful company, and by mingling, at times, in fashionable visits and scenes of amusement. On these occasions, deeming it proper to show the opposers of religion that it requires no austerity of manners, and that a Christian minister need not always maintain the aspect of gravity, he often passed to the other extreme of levity, and even frivolity, in conversation. Though he was an able, and sometimes a powerful, preacher, and irreproachable in general morals, the habit of jesting and story-telling, which he had insensibly acquired, destroyed the savor of godliness in his pastoral intercourse, and exerted a deadly influence on his ministry. His witty anecdotes more than counteracted the good tendency of his sermons. He saw no revival among his people.

D—— impaired his pastoral usefulness by the vol-

untary multiplicity of his secular cares. He was not merely provident and frugal in all his domestic arrangements, as Christian duty requires every minister to be, but he gradually acquired a passion for gain. This led him to engage in transactions incompatible with the absolute consecration which he had made of himself to his holy calling. If he did not descend to any of those sordid expedients denominated by the Apostle love of "filthy lucre," he became proverbially an adept in bargains and business, till these engrossed his time, and rendered him in spirit a secular man. When a revival which prevailed around him seemed to have begun among his own congregation, it soon ceased, because the pastor could not find time to help it forward.

Besides the above hindrances to revivals, through some fault in the character of ministers, there was another class of obstacles, at which I can only glance, arising from defective preaching.

One, for example, was so ambitious of a classical style, that he sacrificed pungency and power to rhetorical embellishment. Or, perhaps, from delicacy, or dread of giving offence, the vital truths of the Gospel, which he fully believed, he exhibited in a phraseology so covert and indefinite as that, virtually, he did not preach the truth at all.

I need not extend my remarks here, as I have



already stated what the general strain of preaching was among revival ministers; and every sort of preaching that was of essentially different character was a hindrance to revivals. There was then, as there is now, a kind of sermons, which seem to be like certain medical nostrums, the chief merit of which is said to be, "that if they do no good, they will do no harm!" But eternity will sanction no such maxim in the awful business of preaching the Gospel. Mediocrity in the circumstantials of this business there may be; but in the spirit, the sentiment, the tendency, of a sermon, there is no half way. It is good, or it is bad.

There were a few instances then of what are sometimes called "moral preachers," who condemned certain vices and urged external duties, but never aimed to make any great truth of the Bible bear with solemn impression on the conscience. There were a few who preached the sovereignty of God in such a way as to provide a refuge for sloth in ministers and Christians. But the obstacle to success which has been the most fatal, and by far the most frequent, within the compass of my observation, especially among ministers who have had little experience in the school of Christ, is too much reliance on themselves, and too little on God. But as I must touch on that topic hereafter, I

dismiss it now, and simply add, that, when there were no revivals at the period to which I have referred, it was generally the fact, either that the whole truth was not exhibited, in the pulpit at least, with pungency and fidelity,—or that the proper tendency of preaching, though good in itself, was frustrated by something decidedly amiss in pastoral influence.

We may advert now to several hindrances of revivals arising from more general causes in the church. In many places it was a prevailing sentiment among Christians, that revivals of religion must be transient. Accordingly, they expected their minister, at a season of special divine influence, to be specially animated and active; and afterwards to relapse into comparative indifference in discharging his duties. Their own conversation, too, and prayers and efforts, were all accommodated to this paralyzing expectation, that sinners would soon cease to be awakened, and Christians to be fervent in spirit; and that, after a few weeks or days, in which religion should be the all-absorbing subject of thought to a whole people, all would of course relapse into insensibility. Where this sentiment among Christians prevailed, the continuance of a revival, though it had begun with most promising appearances, was fatally hindered. At that time,

however, when it was not unusual for a work of grace to last two or three years in the same church, this practical error in Christian feeling was much less prevalent than it is now, when we often see what are called powerful revivals terminated in as many months or weeks, and sometimes even in one week. I cannot stay to discuss this point, but must say, in passing, that there is nothing in the character of God, — nothing in the fearful condition of sinners, or the obligations of Christians, — nothing in any doctrine or promise of the Bible, limiting to a brief continuance the special work of the Holy Spirit among a people. Sloth and unbelief are at the bottom of this error in our churches. What! Shall the Christian persuade himself that it is excusable or unavoidable in him to be lukewarm through nine tenths of his life, because he is sometimes zealous for a month or two? Transient revivals! Shall our prayers and hopes rest satisfied with these? We are drawing on apace to a revival that will last a thousand years; and to another that will be eternal.

Another hindrance to revivals was, such a neglect of discipline in a church as tolerated within its fellowship openly irreligious men. Rarely have I known a church of this description to be visited with a season of refreshing from the divine presence.

Another, was the spirit of controversy. At no period, perhaps, have political animosities raged more fiercely in our country than about the year 1800, embittering social intercourse, and invading the peace of families and churches. Sometimes this baneful spirit extinguished a promising revival. In cases not a few it was itself subdued and expelled by the Spirit of God. But where the demon of political strife gained ascendancy among a people, the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost either did not come or did not abide.

But no form of controversy during that period of revivals was so fraught with deadly mischief to the cause of religion as the clashing of rival Christian sects. If I were to exhibit a tenth part of the facts which lie before me on this subject, they would administer solemn admonition to Christians against that narrow sectarian zeal which would sacrifice the salvation of sinners and the honor of Christ to the interests of a religious party. I will cite only a single specimen, from the narrative of a revival which was in full progress in New Cambridge, Conn., and was suddenly arrested in this way. "At that time a sectarian controversy about certain sentiments, little connected with the essential truths of religion, unhappily arose, and for a time engaged much attention and conversation. This produced

disputes and ill feelings, and seemed greatly to divert from that anxious concern for the salvation of the soul, which had before prevailed. Although in a few weeks this dispute in a great measure subsided, yet this revival never recovered its former life and power. And there has appeared to be very few instances of conviction or conversion since that time." This shows the pernicious tendency of such controversies to check religious awakenings, and quench and grieve away the Spirit of God.

I will only add under this head, that, in a few instances, the Holy Spirit was hindered among a people, by decided opposition on the part of the pastor, or leading members of a church. As there is a sin "which shall never have forgiveness," when committed by obdurate contemners of God and his grace,— a sin that is unpardonable, not because it transcends the mercy of God or the merits of Christ, but because the sinner will be left to himself, and therefore will never repent,— so a church whose minister or members revile the special work of the Holy Spirit, ascribing it to fanaticism, or Satanic agency, are sometimes left to wither under a judicial dereliction, like the mountains of Gilboa, on which there was neither rain nor dew. Some awful examples of this sort are upon record in the history of New England, especially after the time

of Whitefield, in which there was more bitter opposition to revivals than there has been at any other period before or since. I have in my eye, as an illustration of these remarks, a church of Connecticut, which not only refused to admit the revival preachers of 1740 into their pulpit, but publicly censured such of their members as went abroad to hear these preachers. Christ offered them a gracious visit, but they desired him to depart, and he departed, leaving them to a seventy years captivity. God never again appeared to visit this place by his Spirit, in any thing like a general awakening, until the whole of that generation, which virtually forbade him to come, were in their graves.

The next general topic on which I promised to remark, is — The exercises of sinners, under legal convictions. Concerning these, ministers are accustomed to discriminate between impressions and convictions. The former were often produced by sympathy, by solemn appeals to the passions, by alarming providences, or by dread of punishment. The animal or social instincts, or self-love, were at the bottom of these excitements; under their influence sinners sometimes exhibited very hopeful appearances; seemed to be very anxious; — “resolved to lead a new life,” — “made up their minds,” as they said, “to attend to religion as their immediate

and great concern," — but soon they were as careless as ever. These were mere impressions, sometimes serious indeed, or even distressing, for the time, but more commonly slight and evanescent.

Conviction of sin, on the other hand, has a deeper origin. It is a vivid sense on the sinner's conscience, not of his danger chiefly, but of his guilt as a transgressor against God. This, conscience arrays before him in the light of the divine law, shows him its curse, righteous and dreadful as it is, falling upon his own head, and no escape or remedy but through Christ. Now ministers who were skilful as guides to inquiring sinners, deemed it of vital importance to keep the above distinction prominent in all their instructions and encouragements; whereas men of impetuous temper and little experience often treated anxiety in different sinners, as amounting to just the same thing as conviction of guilt, and thus attempted to apply the remedy of the Gospel to hearts that had never been wounded for sin.

But as you feel this to be a subject of special interest, I cannot in any way satisfy your inquiries so well as by pretty free extracts from the narratives to which I have so often referred.

The Rev. Jonathan Miller, of West Britain, Conn., speaking of the exercises of anxious sinners during a revival among his people in 1800, says: —

“They have at first generally, though not universally, been principally affected with a sense of their danger of the wrath of God, and all have resorted to their own works to conciliate his favor, without that submission to him and reliance on Christ which the Gospel requires. While pursuing this course, their painful apprehensions of divine wrath have been gradually overbalanced by successive and increasing discoveries of their guilt, and obstinate depravity of heart, until they have felt their entire dependence on the sovereign, uncovenanted mercy of God, to renew their hearts. While in this situation, they have generally been sensible of dreadful heart-risings against God and his government; their distress of soul has often become so great as very much to interrupt, and sometimes wholly to destroy, their sleep, labor, and appetite for food.”

The venerable Samuel J. Mills, describing a similar work in Tarringford, the same year, says:—

“The subjects of it, in the first stages of their concern, have generally been filled with surprise and astonishment at their past lives. And, seeing themselves in danger, have formed resolutions, and entered on measures, to amend their situation. When led to a full discovery of their own hearts, and to an increasing conviction of the impossibility of ever obtaining relief in their own way, they have felt very sensibly disturbed. They have been ready to plead in their own defence, when they have dared to do it, that they could do no more than they could,—that they never made their own hearts,—and that it was out of their power to change them. They have contended also against God for showing mercy to others while they were left; and even for giving them existence. But no sooner were they led to a discovery of the justice of God in their condemnation,—to



see and to feel that the law was right and holy, and hell their proper place, than they found their mouths shut, and their complaints at an end."

The next extract is from the narrative of Rev. Joseph Washburn, of Farmington:—

"The views and exercises of those under conviction were essentially the same, though very various as to the means and manner of their beginning, and of their degree of continuance. The greater part were for some time in a state of thoughtfulness before they were subject to much distress or conviction of sin. Several were awakened, and experienced great concern of mind, before they knew of any others in the society being in a similar situation, and before any thing unusual had been done to call up their attention. Some would point out what they supposed the means of exciting their concern. Others could recollect nothing in particular as having been the means of this. Yet, so it was, that religion now appeared of infinite importance to them; and those things which a little before they could not fix their attention upon, they were unable to banish from their minds. Some were suddenly alarmed and affected, chiefly from sympathy, or the impressive scene of the meetings, and the solemn things they heard; and in this way were excited to an examination, which issued apparently in a genuine conviction of sin. And some few, after having been proof against the power of sympathy, and passed unaffected through the most likely time, in a human view, were afterwards arrested, and caused to tremble at the bar of conscience. The commandment came, sin revived, and they found themselves in a lost and wretched state.

"In the first stages of concern, the subjects were generally most affected with particular sins, and not so deeply sensible

of the plague of their hearts. They considered themselves transgressors, and condemned by the divine law. Innumerable sins of omission and commission would rise to the view of their mind, with the aggravations of having neglected divine calls and warnings, and abused great mercy; and a sense of danger and fear of divine wrath greatly affected them.

“While in this situation, and being yet ‘ignorant of God’s righteousness,’ or the perfect purity of his nature, the extent and spirituality of his law, and the impossibility of salvation by their own doings, they have ‘gone about to establish their own righteousness,’—fled to external duties,—to prayer,—to resolutions of amendment, and various schemes to recommend themselves to the divine favor; and thus refused to submit themselves to the righteousness of God,—the way of acceptance and peace by Jesus Christ.

“As the work of conviction proceeded, they were driven from their various false refuges, and obtained a clearer view of the spiritual nature and extent of the divine law, and a more realizing sense of the corruption of their hearts, the fountain of iniquity and pollution within, from which all actual sins flow.”

The Rev. Timothy M. Cooley, of Granville, Mass., describing the feelings of anxious sinners in his congregation, says:—

“They encouraged themselves, that, by a few weeks’ seriousness and diligence in duties, they should prepare themselves for regeneration. After persevering for a while in these external duties, they thought their prayers and cries had been sufficient to prevail with God to show mercy. They secretly found fault with God for withholding his grace. The heart arose against

divine sovereignty. Some thought hard of God for giving comfort to others, while he denied it to them. The enmity of the heart rose up, like a venomous serpent, against the Almighty. Such exercises as these discovered to them the total depravity of their hearts. They felt convinced that the garment of self-righteousness, which was so pleasing to them, covered a heart full of opposition to God's character. They were before convinced that they had been guilty of many outward acts of sin, but now they saw something of the fountain of pollution within. They were convinced that they had never prayed, read, or cried, as God required. They still persevered in duties, but seemed, as they expressed it, 'to grow worse and worse.' They discovered that God's law justly condemned them, and that they must be rescued by sovereign mercy, or suffer its awful sanction."

One more extract I shall add from a narrative of a revival in New Haven:—

"The causes which first impressed and awakened the subjects of the work were almost as various as the character which they previously sustained. One was awakened by reflecting on the past; another by anticipating the future: one was impressed while trying to pray, in consequence of a resolution which had been previously made for the purpose. Some were excited to serious consideration by dangerous sickness, from which they afterwards recovered. Some were driven to seek consolation in religion by the pressure of heavy and painful trials. Some were arrested by a particular passage or paragraph in Scripture, which they had often seen and read before. Some were first affected by a particular discourse, or some part of a discourse. Some were taken hold of by a word spoken at random, or by

conversation carried on with the design to produce such an effect. Some have been softened by an affectionate, fervent, and importunate prayer. Some have been impressed by an exhortation at a conference or prayer-meeting. Some were first wrought upon by natural sympathy, and were themselves deeply distressed, merely because they saw others in deep distress. Some had an apprehension that they were left to perish, while others were chosen to salvation; and this had an effect to alarm them. Some could recollect the particular cause which first stirred them up; others could not tell what it was which first awakened them to think seriously on these things. They found this indeed to be the case, that their former repose was broken up, and their souls anxious on the subject of salvation; but what the cause was which first produced in them these feelings they could not tell. Some were deeply impressed by seeing others come forward and enter into solemn covenant with God. This, indeed, was the cause of seriousness to many.

“The views and feelings of the subjects of this work were in many respects alike, and in many respects dissimilar. Some, during the former part of their convictions especially, were principally disturbed from an apprehension of the wrath of God, and the dread of future misery. They knew that they had greatly sinned, and saw nothing before them but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour all the adversaries of God and of Christ. This stared them in the face, deprived them of peace, and filled them with terror. Others were softened and grieved, instead of being amazed and terrified. They were cut to the heart to think that they had sinned against a being of such infinite goodness, purity, and truth; one who had sent his Son into the world to die for guilty, lost, and condemned sinners, and who had loaded

them with favors all their days, while they had requited him nothing but ingratitude, rebellion, and an obstinate persistence in a course of iniquity. This was their most trying reflection; it pierced their very souls, and rent their hearts with anguish. Some could not tell what was the matter with them, and yet something within filled them with agitation and alarm; so that their souls were literally like the troubled sea when it cannot rest."

In the accounts of these revivals, it appears that the anxiety of sinners more commonly arose at first from apprehensions of danger, or from sympathy with the excitement of others around them. In respect to such as held out to be anxious, these feelings, in the progress of their seriousness, were generally succeeded by such views of God and his law, and their own hearts, as produced genuine conviction of sin. In respect to this stage of their exercises, the Rev. Joseph Washburn, whom I before quoted, remarks, that, while there was great variety among anxious sinners as to the degree and continuance of their convictions —

"Yet with respect to the points of conviction, or the truths in view of which the mind was affected, there was a very great uniformity. They were, almost without exception, brought to feel and acknowledge, previous to any permanent relief and hope, that they were wholly evil, and perfectly helpless in themselves; that all their strivings and resolutions had been

in such a manner, and from such motives, that they were not merely in vain, but were a practical rejection of the way of acceptance by Christ; that it was not in their hearts, and never would be, without divine influence, to ask for mercy aright, or to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the Gospel; that they were, therefore, in the hands of a sovereign God, whose law and Gospel they had abused."

As an example of those cases in which the enmity of the heart to divine truth was most conspicuous, the same narrative states the feelings of an individual in his own words:—

"I had a clear sense of my guilt, and experienced sensible opposition of heart against God, and against the doctrines of the Gospel, which I heard preached. The Bible also was to me a most painful and odious book. I could not endure to read it,—every page appeared to be against me. While in this situation, I looked on every side for relief. I fled to every thing for refuge, but to God. For a time I strove hard to disbelieve the doctrines of the Gospel. I searched diligently to find arguments against them,—particularly the doctrine of the endless, future punishment of the wicked. I listened to the arguments of the Universalists. But all was in vain,—the Scriptures were decisive,—and I was obliged to admit the necessity of religion and an interest in Christ, in order to any true peace in this or another world. Accordingly I set myself very earnestly, as I thought, to obtain it,—labored hard to make my heart better, and to recommend myself to my Saviour. But finding all attempts of this kind fail, and that the opposition of my heart continued, I fled for refuge to

Antinomianism. I thought it must be impossible for a sinner to love God, as long as he supposed that his sins were not forgiven, and that God was his enemy. I therefore endeavored to think that Christ had died for me in particular, and that my sins were all pardoned;—hoping that if I could persuade myself of this, it would give me peace, and be unto me according to my faith,—or, as I now view it, my own self-flattery. But I was not suffered to wrap myself up in this delusion. I next attempted to persuade myself that there was no such thing as free moral agency, or accountability,—but that mankind were mere machines, actuated by a blind and fatal necessity. But I was unable to reason myself into a belief of this. I had a consciousness of sin which I could not throw off. I felt my desert of misery, and the perfect reasonableness of my being required to give my heart to God. My heart, however, was still opposed,—his character and conduct I did not love,—especially his leaving me in this situation when he was able to deliver me, and did deliver others, and give them hope and comfort; and whenever I heard of any particular instance of this, it caused the opposition of my heart to rise very high. I was told that I must submit. I attempted to do it,—and to flatter myself that I did submit,—but my submission would last no longer than 'till the character of God came clearly into view again. After these things, I had a lively sense that in all my strivings I had had no sincere regard to God,—but had been actuated in every thing by perfect selfishness. That all my cries to God had been mere mockery,—flowing from a heart totally opposed to him. Never before had I such an idea of the plague of my heart, or of the sensible enmity against God which an awakened sinner may be the subject of. My distress was now such that I thought I could not endure it. I slept

but little, and, whenever I awoke from sleep, my distress and anguish came upon me in a moment. I had no relief,—and, what added exceedingly to my distress, was the thought that it would probably not only be constant, but forever.”

As to the nature of those convictions that appeared to be genuine, it may be remarked that the subjects of them manifested a deep sense of their entire alienation from God, and opposition to his character. They saw that an amiable temper and a moral life are of no account if the heart is supremely in love with sin. They saw that they were justly condemned by the divine law, which they had continually broken in thought, word, and deed; that they were utterly without excuse, as transgressors of that law; that, though repentance is their indispensable and immediate duty, they never should repent, if left to themselves, without special, divine influence; and that, if they should ever be saved, it must be through the merits of Christ, applied to them by the Holy Spirit, through the grace of that God who has mercy on whom he will have mercy.

That such views among anxious, unrenewed sinners were so distinct and uniform in different congregations is to be ascribed, under God, to the fidelity with which these congregations were instructed from the pulpit, and in private religious



meetings, as to the elementary truths of the Gospel. The great revival at Northampton in 1734, &c., began with a sermon on the old doctrine of justification by faith alone. And though great fault was found, as President Edwards says, with the introduction into the pulpit of this subject, designed to counteract the "Arminianism which about this time seemed to appear with a very threatening aspect upon the interests of religion, yet it was most evidently attended with a very remarkable blessing of heaven to the souls of the people in the town." Thus it was in the revivals of 1800, &c.; different kinds of preaching made serious impressions on the hearers, but no sinner was brought thoroughly to feel his guilty and lost condition, and his need of salvation by grace, except by being clearly instructed in the primary doctrines of the Bible.

The degrees of excitement attendant on legal convictions were very various in cases of different individuals. There were some examples of extreme suffering. One who had for some time been in this condition, on being asked what were his feelings towards careless sinners, said, "They are to be pitied. An eternity of such torment as I experienced for a time by a view of the Divine character, and the happiness of others in serving

God, would be intolerably dreadful." That these intense feelings of terror and despair were a reality was apparent to all who saw him. "His friends feared, that, if his distress should continue and increase, he could not live. They trembled lest they should see in him the awful example of a sinner plunging into eternal woe, rather than submit to God. He was, therefore, a subject of the earnest prayers of God's people."

Another man of middle age, and strong, native sense, in hearing a sermon, was smitten with a deep conviction of his guilt. He said at once to himself, "The salvation of my soul is of immediate and infinite importance; I now resolve that I will delay it no longer, but will immediately reform, and lead a new life." In this resolution he considered himself as immovably fixed. But in walking home alone, two difficulties came upon him. He had made this resolution in mere reliance on himself; and only a part of himself had consented to it. His understanding and conscience were for it; his fears and hopes were for it; his 'vile, ungodly, obstinate heart' was against it. His decision, and the comfort derived from it, were dashed to atoms when he came to look into himself. The whole of the following night he spent in horror, — without a moment's sleep. The next day was a day of

anguish in view of his own guilt, and exposure to everlasting ruin. He tried to labor, but could not;—he heard another sermon, but found no relief. Instead of having his heart melted and mended, it became more obdurate still; for he had been relying on his own selfish resolutions and on the means of salvation, and not on the God of salvation. A second sleepless night and a second day of anguish ensued. The third night, being exhausted, he had a little broken sleep, but awaked to keener sufferings. About the dawn of day a new train of thoughts engrossed his mind concerning the absolute perfections of God and his administration, and the duty of unreserved submission to his will. All was right on the part of God and the Gospel. The fearful agony was over; and the conflict was followed by a serenity which, he afterwards hoped, was the peace of God, passing all understanding. In this case the substance, without the exact phraseology, is taken from one of the revival narratives. Repeated instances are mentioned, in these narratives, of mental distress so intense as to destroy sleep and appetite, to produce paleness and emaciation, and seriously to impair bodily health for a time. But of such cases it is proper to say, in passing, that they were exceptions to the general course of facts, and that, comparatively, they were few.

In a considerable proportion of the above cases there was some derangement of the animal system, involving a predisposition to melancholy, and exposing the subject of it to great temptations. "One knows not how," says President Edwards, "to deal with such persons; they turn every thing that is said to them the wrong way; and there is nothing that the devil seems to make so great a handle of as a melancholy humor, unless it be the real corruption of the heart."

Having thus adverted to cases of extreme distress, it is necessary to add, as a remarkable characteristic of these revivals, that there were no instances of outcries, or of any public disorders, in religious assemblies. You will recollect, that, concerning such things, which generally prevailed in his time, President Edwards, in the early part of his ministry, speaks rather the language of encouragement than of censure. At a later period, indeed, when he wrote his work on Religious Affections, his views seem to have been somewhat different.

The degree of regularity which will prevail in public assemblies under excitement will depend chiefly on usage and public sentiment; and in religious assemblies, this public sentiment will depend chiefly on the known views of those who are accustomed to lead in these assemblies. At a public

funeral in New England, no one of sound understanding, even amid the keenest trials, is expected to break forth into clamorous expressions of grief. Whence then the loud wailings and howlings at a heathen funeral? Custom requires this in the latter case, and forbids it in the former. In the early Christian assemblies, it was a common thing for the preacher to be interrupted in his discourse by loud applauses, clapping, stamping, and waving of handkerchiefs. But the men thus interrupted were understood to be pleased with these things, and to invite them. Whereas men of solid dignity, like Chrysostom and Augustine, who frowned on these excesses, suffered no interruption. Now apply this principle to revivals. You know, that, about thirty years since, there was a powerful work of grace in the Western States, which resulted in the saving conversion, doubtless, of multitudes. But this work was attended with disorders, which the best men condemned at the time, and which have been the subject of their growing lamentation till now. How did these disorders begin? and why did they increase? till simple tears and silent moans were exchanged for loud groaning, screaming, barking, howling, swooning, and every form of violent convulsions. Preachers, to a considerable extent, approved of these irregularities; and if they did not

directly encourage them, they were known to rejoice in them (and doubtless they did so with sincere zeal), as tokens of the mighty power of God.

Look now at the revivals of about the same period in New England, in which hundreds of different places were visited by copious showers of divine influence, and in which thousands of sermons were preached to crowded assemblies, solemn as eternity; in which hundreds of thousands listened to these with a deep, fixed, silent attention, while among these multitudes were many hearts bursting with agony, and many eyes streaming with tears; and yet, throughout these scenes of overwhelming and awful interest, not one instance is stated in which the order of the sanctuary or of the conference room was interrupted by any irregularity. Why, I say again, was God worshipped in one region as the God of order, and in another as the God of confusion? Let ministers think of this. Let elders in the churches, and all men who are called to give direction and character to revivals, especially where there is a tendency to disorder in religious assemblies, think of this.

It was my intention to remark on the length of convictions, and the causes by which this was apparently influenced in different cases. But this letter ought not to be further extended.

#### LETTER IV.

GENTLEMEN, — *The exercises of hopeful converts* is the next topic on which you will expect me to remark, in speaking of those revivals concerning which I have undertaken, at your request, to give some account. I say hopeful converts, because this modifying word was generally used by ministers of that day, and because, after a lapse of thirty years, it seems to me a safer way of expressing the thing intended, than any unqualified phraseology. On this point I shall have occasion to touch in another place.

The first thing which I shall notice in regard to those who became hopeful converts in these revivals is, that generally they could not fix on the exact time of their own conversion; and that, in the few cases which were exceptions to this remark, the individuals concerned did not regard the change in themselves, at the time, as being conversion, but gradually came to the conclusion that it was so by subsequent reflection. Of this description I rec-

ollect but three cases mentioned in all the narratives of these revivals. One of these, in a letter written three months afterwards, mentions the day in which he then hoped that he experienced the new birth. Of another it is said, that, "On returning from a field, to which he had retired for secret prayer, all who saw him perceived in him a great alteration. He went out borne down with distress, and returned full of joy. He now thinks [the account was written four years afterwards], that, if ever he experienced a change of heart, it was at that time, though he then had not the most distant idea of any such thing. Another, who entertained a hope of having experienced a saving change, in writing to a friend, specifies the evening in which this change was supposed to have taken place; but adds, "at this time I thought of no such thing."

Besides these cases, doubtless there were others, perhaps many others, who could fix with more or less satisfaction on the particular time of their supposed conversion. But with the subjects of this work generally it was otherwise; nor were they encouraged by ministers to regard certainty on this point as belonging to the evidences of piety. The most judicious ministers viewed this matter much as Baxter did, who, in the midst of his eminent attainments in grace and through a long life



of devoted piety, never professed to know, or to think it essential that he should know, the exact time when he was born again. Doubtless this view of the case is correct, according to the commonly received doctrine, that the regeneration of a sinner is an instantaneous work of the Holy Spirit, and, to the subject of it, imperceptible, except from the subsequent exhibitions of the character and life. It was, besides, a very common fact, that those exercises which afterwards appeared to have been the commencement of holiness in a sinner's heart were regarded by himself at the time as a relapse into spiritual indifference. The reason seems to have been, that he lost his anxiety, and even forgot himself, in the all absorbing views of God and Christ and the Gospel which took possession of his soul. Yet, while the fear of hell subsided, a deeper feeling of personal guilt, and of absolute dependence on sovereign mercy, was the invariable consequence.

Dr. Charles Backus, one of the most judicious and able ministers of this period, said: "In those who appeared to become the subjects of saving grace, the first alarm was followed with a more full discovery of their moral pollution. In general they said, that, when Divine truth first appeared in a new and pleasing light, they scarcely

thought of their own safety, or whether they were, or were not, converted. They were abundant in acknowledging, that, if Gospel grace were not free and sovereign, there could be no hope for such great sinners as they were, who had not made any advances of themselves towards submission to the will of God. None manifested high confidence of their conversion."

The Rev. Dr. G. H. Cowles, formerly of Bristol, Conn., remarked concerning the hopeful converts among his people, that they generally found relief from their distress in coming to just views of God and his government. "On discovering the glory of the divine character, they felt a disposition to rejoice in God, whatever should become of themselves. Their minds were so engrossed by the great truths of the Gospel, that they thought little or nothing about their own salvation. Some have said it seemed to them that God's character would appear glorious and lovely, even if they should be cast off. Their love to God and his government appeared to originate from a real reconciliation to his holy character, and therefore to be essentially different from that selfish love which arises from a belief that God designs to save us in particular." — Accordingly, it was by gradually finding in themselves a new and settled disposition to delight in the truths

and duties of religion that they came to indulge a hope of their own personal interest in the great salvation.

The Rev. Alexander Gillet, of Torrington, said: "Previous to the new birth, the subjects of the work have had clear convictions of their native depravity, — of the pride, selfishness, and awful stubbornness of their hearts. After they had experienced the great change, they appeared to themselves worse than ever. Then they could exclaim, 'I thought I knew something of my heart before, but I knew nothing. It appears to me a sink of all treachery and abomination. How can I be a *new creature*, and have my heart filled with so many vain thoughts,' " &c. Again, he adds: "Another conspicuous feature of the work is, that, when God had taken off their distressful burden, they at first had no suspicion of their hearts being renewed; but were rather alarmed with the apprehension that the Spirit of God had forsaken them, and that they were becoming more hardened than ever. In this situation, longing for the return of their anxiety, if asked, 'How does the character of God appear to you?' they readily answered, 'Great, excellent, glorious. I wish for no other God to govern the world; — no other Saviour but Christ; — no other way of salvation but the Gospel.' They wondered

what had become of their burden. In time, however, experience taught them that their load was taken off in consequence of the heart's being brought to love that very religion which they had been opposing."

The Rev. Dr. Woolworth, in describing the subjects of the same work at Bridgehampton, L. I., said: "When reduced to self-despair, they have usually experienced divine manifestations. These manifestations, in some instances, have been immediate and clear at first, and connected with great peace and joy in God. But more commonly they have been slow and progressive. The person has felt calm, and experienced a degree of satisfaction in view of divine objects. But these exercises have not been such, at first, as to bring in evidence of their being new creatures. Many have continued in this state for a considerable time, some for weeks, without any apprehension of their being the subjects of saving grace. This has been the case till increasing light, and a comparison of their exercises with the Gospel, have led them on to a comfortable hope of their good estate."

Without multiplying these extracts, it seems proper to remark, that, in the narratives from which I have taken them, there is a peculiar coincidence in the above characteristics as to the exercises of

hopeful converts. And the coincidence is equally remarkable between these exercises and those described by President Edwards in the great revival of his time. He says: "It has more frequently been so among us, that, when persons have had the Gospel ground of relief for lost sinners discovered to them, and have been entertaining their minds with the sweet prospect, they have thought nothing at that time of their being converted. There is wrought in them a holy repose of soul in God, through Christ, and a secret disposition to fear and love him, and to hope for blessings from him in this way; and yet they have no imagination that they are now converted; it does not so much as come into their minds."

To those who experimentally know the power of the Gospel, there is nothing incredible or strange in these statements. It results from the nature of that divine influence by which the sinner's heart is transformed from sin to holiness, that the change is imperceptible to himself at the time; it being afterwards manifested, and for the most part, gradually manifested, by its fruits. Besides, when the love of God is first shed abroad in a man's heart, while the same objects that kindle to holy rapture the soul of Gabriel are presented to his view, it were strange if he could forget the God of the uni-

verse, the Redeemer of the world, and the grace that exalts and honors this Redeemer, in saving the guilty, — it were strange indeed if he could forget all these objects, and limit his thoughts to his own little self. The question of his own conversion, at a season of such joyful and awful interest, is not the chief object of his attention; “it does not so much as come into his mind.” Further still; the sinner, while unsanctified, may have some indefinite notions of what it is to love God and cordially to rely on Christ, but he does not truly know what these things mean, till he learns their meaning from *experience*. It is not strange, therefore, that, after his conversion, he should exercise, for a longer or shorter time, what are truly Christian graces, without knowing that they are so. On the contrary, the most groundless confidence is commonly that which springs up at once to full strength without regard to evidence.

I proceed to notice other exercises of hopeful converts, which are only a further development of those already mentioned. They had, in general, a deep feeling of their own guilt and ruin as sinners. I have already said, that convictions of this sort which preceded conversion were often greatly increased after it; and why should it not be so? A man in a dark room is surrounded with objects which he does not

see, because it is dark. Let in a little light, and he sees these objects obscurely; let in more, — he sees them clearly. So it is with the Christian's heart. Why does he complain so bitterly of sin in himself? Because there is more sin in his heart than when he was unconverted? No, — but there is more light. He can see what is there, since "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in his heart." This solves the paradox, if such it is to any, why growth in grace is also growth in self-abasement; why the Christian's highest spiritual happiness is conjoined with his deepest exercises of repentance; and why the full light of heaven will enable him to see, more vividly than ever before, that "sin is exceeding sinful." Now, any theory of conversion that encourages a sinner to think himself born of God, on account of something that he has felt or done, or "made up his mind" to do, while he is still an utter stranger to the "plague of his own heart," is clearly contrary to the whole current of the Bible and of Christian experience.

I add the following case, as one among very many illustrations of the foregoing remarks. A man of mature age and sound understanding, who was numbered among the hopeful converts, closed an account of his own exercises thus: "I saw that all I had done to obtain salvation was wholly selfish; that

all my opposition to the doctrines of grace originated in pride, because I was unwilling that God should work in me to will and to do of his good pleasure. Now I rejoice that he does so, and yet find in myself the unimpaired possession of moral freedom. Before, I thought that I was right, and God wrong. Now, I feel that God is right, and I wrong. Having obtained help from God, I continued to this time, a brand plucked from the fire; in myself a poor, miserable, guilty sinner, — if I am ever saved, to God, through Christ, will be all the glory forever.”

It is a sentiment common to all these narratives, though expressed in a great variety of forms, that the salvation of a sinner is wholly of God; so that, aside from the influence of sovereign mercy, he never would have done any thing towards submitting to the terms of the Gospel. Often did anxious inquirers resolve, in their own strength, to make the concerns of their salvation their chief object, and then speedily relapse into their former insensibility. The same resolutions, perhaps, were renewed again and again with the same result, till they saw that nothing could subdue the obstinate depravity of their hearts, short of special, sanctifying grace. When they came to just views of their voluntary alienation from God, and yet of their dependence on his mere mercy, so as cheerfully to resign themselves



into his hands, the agony was over, and commonly was followed by a delightful tranquillity and joy in God.

The Rev. Asahel Hooker, one of the ablest divines and best pastors that New England has enjoyed, in remarking on the subject of the revival at Goshen, Conn., in 1799, said: "In many instances, when their attention was first arrested, they set out with apparent hope of working out their own salvation with ease and despatch. But the attempt served to show them that they were still working out their own destruction. Those who became eventually reconciled to the truth, and found a comfortable hope of their good estate, were led to such an acquaintance with the plague of their own hearts as served to subvert all hope arising from themselves and their own doings. They were shown, that, if saved, it must be not by works of righteousness which they had done or could do, but by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, according to the divine purpose and grace in Christ." He adds, as a distinguishing feature of the work, that the doctrines of grace were received by its subjects uniformly and with one consent; though many of them had formerly "contemplated these doctrines with abhorrence."

In describing the exercises of hopeful converts,

another point which deserves attention is, the sources and degrees of their enjoyments. This part of the subject I must treat with greater brevity than I had intended. The most striking characteristic of these religious enjoyments may be described negatively, by saying, that they were not of the selfish kind.

By this it is not meant that the true Christian is indifferent to his own happiness, since the word of God neither requires nor allows him to be so. Happiness, as he knows from the Bible and the testimony of his own heart, is inseparably conjoined with holiness. His hope, therefore, to be like Christ, and to be with him, is, of course, a hope of eternal blessedness in heaven. But while he is bound thus to regard the welfare of his own soul, of which he is made the special and accountable guardian, in a manner which is not true of any other soul, it is not his duty to regard the glory of God and the interests of the universe as subordinate to his own individual interests. The system which makes God the centre of regard, and requires all to love him supremely, tends to universal harmony. But the system that allows every one to love himself supremely, and to regard God, and all other things, only with ultimate reference to his own happiness, is a system of perfect and eternal discord; for it makes as many centres of supreme regard as there are moral agents.

Such were not the feelings cherished in the revivals of which I am speaking. The hopeful converts were accustomed to distinguish between genuine and false enjoyment in religion, according to the brief specimen subjoined in the form of dialogue.

*A.* "On what ground does the true Christian submit to God, and rejoice in him?"

*B.* "From a firm belief that he will manage all things in the very best manner for his great kingdom."

*A.* "Whence comes the fancied submission of the hypocrite?"

*B.* "From an apprehension that by it he shall be a gainer; that without it, there can be no safety for him. As a refuge from evil he throws himself into the hands of God; while the true Christian confides not from necessity, but choice."

*A.* "What is the object of selfish gratitude?"

*B.* "A supposed personal interest in the partial goodness of God."

*A.* "In what does the truly pious heart chiefly rejoice?"

*B.* "In the assurance that God will glorify himself and glorify his Son in the salvation of sinners; and that Christ, in dying for our redemption, has magnified the law, and made it honorable."

The most common source of enjoyment among

those whose hearts were apparently renewed was found in contemplating the perfections of God. Their feelings were often expressed in language like this: "God is so glorious that I wish others might praise him forever, even if I should perish."

The Rev. Jeremiah Hallock, a patriarch of Connecticut revivals, described a man who had suffered intensely under legal convictions, but afterwards informed his minister, that he now saw unspeakable preciousness in Christ; that it was his delight to pour out his heart in prayer for Christ's dear ministers, for the cause of Zion, for the poor heathen, for his enemies. Then, after a short pause, he said to his venerable pastor: "I wish you would pray for me, that I may be converted, if God can convert me consistently with his glory. Pray also for my poor children, that God would convert them; not that they are better, or their souls worth any more, than my neighbor's."

The Rev. Asahel Hooker says in regard to the religious enjoyments by which the new heart discovered itself: "In some it seems to be first apparent by a spirit of complacency in the perfection of God's law; in others, by a sense of his justice in the punishment of sin; in others, by their approbation of his holy sovereignty; and in others, by complacency in the glorious character and all-sufficiency of the Redeemer."

Connected with religious enjoyment, the case of individuals is often mentioned, who, after indulging for a time some trembling hope in their own behalf, have had a sense of their own sinfulness, so overwhelming as to lead them to think it impossible that they should have any grace. The dawn of a bright and joyful morning was succeeded in the experience of many, by clouds and darkness of longer or shorter continuance, and of various degrees of intensity, from painful doubts of their own sincerity to almost total despair. Nor was it an uncommon thing, that frequent alternations of hope and despondency occurred in the feelings of the same individual.

This leads me to remark, that another characteristic in the exercises of hopeful converts was humility.

In conducting these revivals so as to avoid the fanatical excesses witnessed in 1740, &c., which had occasioned the most lamentable results, ministers deemed it important that the simple truths of the Gospel should be set before the mind in the plainest manner, without violent appeals to the passions. It was their object, indeed, to make deep impressions on the hearts of sinners, but to do this only by means of the truth. Accordingly, the whole tendency of things was to produce exercises of the calm, solemn, pungent kind, rather than passionate and clamorous excitement. In very few cases, if at all, were those

who had recently entertained hope called upon to exhibit themselves in a public assembly by telling their experiences, or by any other mode of teaching others. Generally, they viewed themselves as so ignorant and unworthy, that, instead of teaching others, it became them to sit at the feet of the meanest, to receive instruction. The great truths and duties of religion, too, were the chief topics of private conversation in families and neighborhoods, rather than any ostentatious relation of personal experiences.

The narrative of the revival in Goshen, Conn., says: "It is not usual for those who are hopeful subjects of mercy to seem wise in their own conceits, or to have high thoughts of their own experiences and attainments in religion; but in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than themselves. The reason which accounts for the fact is its being a uniform characteristic of the work, that it has sooner or later led the subjects of it to a deep sense of their own unworthiness. It is not uncommon for them to think that they are more vile than others, and that they have less evidence of being sanctified than is usual with true saints."

Of the hopeful converts, another narrative says: "They have not manifested any appearance of spiritual pride and ostentation, and censoriousness towards others, but a spirit of humility and meekness."

The temper which they generally manifested, corresponds remarkably with that described by President Edwards. "When they are lowest in the dust, emptied most of themselves, and, as it were, annihilating themselves before God;—when they are nothing, and God is all, are seeing their own unworthiness, depending not at all on themselves, but alone on Christ, and ascribing all glory to God; then their souls are most in the enjoyment of satisfying rest; excepting that at such times they apprehend themselves to be not sufficiently self-abased; for then, above all times, do they long to be lower." Yet this sagacious judge of Christian character says, that a spirit of censoriousness was the worst disease which attended the great work in his day. He speaks of some, whose habit it was very confidently to determine from a little conversation with a man, or from hearing a minister pray or preach, whether he was converted or not. And they were not at all scrupulous in expressing to others the opinion which they had thus formed concerning any one, whether he was a Christian or a hypocrite. But, in the glorious work of grace which prevailed at the beginning of this century, there was almost an entire absence of this hateful, self-complacent, unchristian spirit of censoriousness. "The loftiness of man was bowed down, and the haughtiness of men was made low;

and the Lord alone was exalted." Especially were youthful professors of piety modest. Then there were no beardless oracles to stand forth, after a Christian experience, at best but very brief, and say of such venerable guides in the church as Mills and Hallock, that they did not understand the subject of revivals, and were behind the spirit of the age.

I come now to a distinct and very important branch of the remarks which I proposed to make, respecting those who were accounted subjects of grace, namely, the treatment of them by ministers and Christians.

In general, it was deemed indispensable to adopt such a course respecting persons of this description as should not tend to lead them into fatal mistakes. It was customary to describe them in a twofold manner, namely, by the views which they entertained of themselves, and by the views which ministers and pious people entertained respecting them. According to the former method, such language as the following was adopted: "A goodly number entertain hope." "The man, at length, was brought to view himself as a subject of grace." "His wife has since embraced a comfortable hope." "As the fruits of this work, forty are rejoicing in hope." This phraseology expressed no opinion of him who gave the



narrative, respecting the godly sincerity of the persons described. What were their views concerning their own spiritual condition was all he undertook to state.

In using the other mode of description he did express his own views of the persons concerned, but almost uniformly with some hypothetical adjunct denoting the caution which he thought it proper to use on such a subject. For example, when a minister was called to speak of those who gave evidence of being truly converted, he adopted some of the various terms in common use to denote this, but nearly always by prefixing the word *hopeful*, or some other of equivalent import. Thus he said, "We trust that seventy may be reckoned as *hopeful* converts." In other cases the phrase was, "*hopeful* subjects of grace;" — "*hopefully* renewed;" — "*hopefully* become pious;" — "*hopefully* born of God;" — "*apparently* reconciled to God;" — "*in the judgment of charity* they have become new creatures." It was not from accident, that, in the narratives of those revivals, where phrases of this sort are used about two hundred and twenty-five times, the qualifying word "*hopeful*," or something synonymous, was used by all the writers, excepting fifteen times, in which "converts," "new converts," "young converts," were spoken of absolutely; and three of

these fifteen cases were in a single narrative forwarded from Vermont.\* It should be observed, too, that among several thousand hopeful conversions, the case of only one individual is referred to as having occurred within the "week past;" while the descriptions generally apply to cases that occurred from one year to three years before the accounts were written.

Some of the Revival Associations may, perhaps, think such particularity quite needless. But I recollect that a venerable father of the English dissenting church cautioned a young minister not to use the terms, "thy servant," "thy handmaid," in praying with ignorant, unconverted persons when dangerously sick, lest they should draw some groundless conclusion in their own favor. For reasons far more weighty, when professedly speaking of the spiritual state of men, whose eternal interests may be put in jeopardy by a verbal mistake, the language we use should be such as cannot lead to misapprehension. In two cases, at least, within our own circle, devout young men, of small experience in revivals, have spoken to me, with a numerical statement of the "conversions," — "wonderful conversions," — which

\* If there is any failure as to numerical exactness in this statement, it must be so trifling as not to affect the merits of the case.

took place in a particular neighborhood "yesterday afternoon" and "last evening." In one of these cases, I was obliged to know that the "converts," so unconditionally announced, spoke of their own supposed "conversion" with profane contempt in the course of a few days afterwards. In the revivals of 1800, &c., it is a prominent fact, that ministers used great caution in giving opinions concerning the spiritual state of living individuals, which they might apply to themselves. This remark, of course, does not apply to that class of tempted, mourning, doubting converts whose evidences of sincerity were conspicuous to all but themselves, and who needed special consolation and encouragement from their spiritual guides.

You will anticipate another remark, which comes in connection with the foregoing statements, that it was not an object with the conductors of these revivals to encourage early hope.

Their theory was, that true religion, though it exist for a while without a hope, will not perish, but will be the salvation of the soul; but that a hope without religion will perish, and be the ruin of the soul. One of the narratives says, "It is affecting to see how jealous the subjects of the work have been, lest they should imbibe a false hope. Some whose hopes have been given up and renewed several

times, still trembled lest they should fix down on the foundation of the hypocrite. Before conversion they had supposed a true believer to be free from sinful propensities; but when they find in themselves a heart deceitful above all things, doubts prevail, God withdraws, and they regard their hope as having been a mere refuge of lies." Another says, "Some having a delightful perception of the glory of God, began soon 'to abound in hope;' but the greater part were brought very *gradually* to entertain a hope that they were reconciled to God." Another says, "In some instances, the enemy has attempted to divert people from their anxiety by premature hopes." Such was the general fact as to the dread which was felt concerning a false hope; and the case, let me add once more, was just the same in the time of Edwards, who said concerning the class of persons now in view, — "They generally have an awful apprehension of the dreadful and undoing nature of a false hope; and there has been observable in most a great caution, lest, in giving an account of their experiences, they should say too much, and use too strong terms."

This is a subject of immeasurable importance and difficulty, concerning which Christian discretion settles some general principles, while the details of pastoral practice must be adapted to the endless variety

of circumstances and character found among the individuals of a congregation. In what cases it is safe to tell a man who has recently been under solemn religious impressions (I mean, to tell him by words, or by any course of measures), that there is good evidence of his being a child of God, and what time is requisite that such evidence may be exhibited, are points on which every minister must judge as to the members of his own flock, and judge under the fearful responsibilities of the final day.

You are aware, gentlemen, that the question has often been raised of late, What interval should there ordinarily be between hopeful conversion and public profession of religion? And you may wish to know whether the experience of the churches to which I have been alluding throws any light on this question. It is easy to state facts with which I am well acquainted from personal knowledge, and from the testimony of ministers. But the statement can be only a general one, it being impossible to fix with precision any limitations, that shall apply to all cases. As the continuance of legal convictions differed from one hour to many weeks, and even months, in different persons, so the evidence that a particular man is born again may be more complete in a few days than could possibly be given in a whole year by another particular man, of very different character

and intellectual habits. But the ministers of whom I have been speaking would not have encouraged the former man to enter the church in one week after his hope began; and that because more time for self-examination would be important to himself; and because the other man would be thereby encouraged to a decidedly premature offering of himself for membership in the church.

Ministers urged it as the immediate duty of all men publicly to profess Christ; but to have themselves, and to exhibit to others, evidence of real friendship to Christ, they deemed indispensable to consistency in this solemn transaction. The churches in Goshen, Norfolk, Tarringford, and others like them, under the guidance of experienced and eminent pastors, never urged any one hastily to enter their communion. The most common time stated in the narratives between hopeful conversion and public profession was about six months. In one church, Rutland, Vt., a shorter interval is mentioned than in any other case, and this was two months. There is, doubtless, a liability to err on both sides of this subject; but the present liability, if I mistake not, is to err on the side of too much haste. As I have no time now to give reasons for this opinion, I shall, if God permit, resume the subject of premature hopes and professions hereafter.

The spiritual watchmen in these churches generally, when their faithful efforts were blessed to rouse sinners from their deadly apathy, took care to instruct them, in the conference room, and in private visits, as to the nature of true religion. And when they entertained hopes, they took care still to instruct them as to the evidences of piety. When they became candidates for admission to the church, the usual method was for the pastor, in company with the deacons, a committee of the church, and such of its members as chose to be present, to meet them for prayer and examination into their religious belief and experience, their motives in wishing to unite with the church, &c.

When these seasons of examination embraced a large number of hopeful converts of all descriptions, from hoary age to the bloom of youth; especially when these came forward on the day of public admission to the church, no scene on this side the judgment could surpass the solemnity of the occasion. My limits do not allow me to describe to you the delightful and awful interest awakened by such a transaction in my own congregation and in other places.

Having, as you know, but imperfectly recovered from the severe effects of the last winter's influenza, I am called, in the providence of God, to the self-

denial of taking refuge, during the approaching cold season, in a southern climate. Wherever my lot may be cast, should sufficient health be granted me, I shall resume my pen, and send you some remarks on the general results of these revivals, and some reflections adapted to the present state of our churches. In the mean time may God bless, with his special presence, the instructors and students of our beloved Seminary. May his Spirit sanctify you, guide your sacred studies, and prepare you to be revival preachers, qualified to labor for Him in the nineteenth century.



## LETTER V.

GENTLEMEN,— Some *general results* of the revivals I have been describing, are now to be mentioned.

The cases of apostasy which occur among hopeful subjects of renewing grace, always constitute an interesting topic of inquiry in narratives of revivals. These cases are lamentable indeed, if we regard only the individuals who thus apostatize; but beyond comparison more lamentable still, if we take into view the consequences to the cause of religion generally. Hence in estimating the character of a past revival, the most judicious ministers and Christians have thought proper to ask, “What proportion of its professed subjects have fallen away?” Such an inquiry is reasonable, because it enters fundamentally into the principles of that revival, and the methods in which it was conducted.

In reviewing the glorious work of God, of which I have undertaken to give you some account, the fact is to be stated, to the honor of divine grace and

as a just testimony to the wisdom and fidelity of those who were the chief instruments in promoting this work, that the cases of apostasy were very few. The Rev. Dr. Hyde, of Lee, in referring to a revival which prevailed among his people sixteen years before, mentions one hundred and ten who united with the church, among whom there were afterwards a few apostasies; but in the narrative of two subsequent revivals he states no instance of this sort. Excepting the above case, all these narratives, while they have special respect to this point, and while they extend to a compass of many hundred miles, and were generally written after a lapse of time sufficient for a full development of character, in the professed converts, yet mention but three instances of apostasy among the thousands that were added to the church. Besides these, a few others are referred to as having entertained hopes, who fell away without having made a profession of religion.

Now, on the supposition that there were more cases of defection, and even many more than are included in this statement, still I presume that the real fact, as to the small number of such defections, is without a parallel in the history of the church. But results so unusual did not take place without the influence of causes adequate to account for them. Before these revivals the prevalent strain

of preaching, for a considerable period, had been such as to promote sound, doctrinal knowledge in the churches. In all the means, too, which were employed for carrying forward these revivals, ministers proceeded with their eyes fixed on certain things, which were then universally regarded as the mistakes of good men, in similar seasons of divine influence that were passed. It was perfectly well remembered what an overwhelming tide — partly of sectarian acrimony and partly of unhallowed prejudice against all evangelical religion — came in upon the church, from the grievous indiscretions of Davenport and others about 1740. It was remembered that the fanatical excesses of that period were followed by a dire reaction, in which, for a third of a century, special divine influence was withdrawn from the land. These facts, after the modern period of revivals commenced, made ministers cautious in their management. There were, indeed, occasional indiscretions. During a powerful work of grace, which prevailed in my childhood, a zealous preacher, at the close of a public lecture, called on all impenitent sinners, “who would then make up their minds to be on the Lord’s side,” to rise and declare that purpose by speaking aloud. Scores of hearts in the assembly were ready to burst with deep anxiety, but the incongruity of such a proposal, in the reg-

ular worship of God, was instinctively and generally felt. After a dead silence of a few moments, five or six men rose, and made the declaration which was desired. I was old enough to observe them all as they spoke; but among the blessed fruits of that work not one of these was numbered, and some of them soon became open infidels. But one other instance like this occurred within my knowledge till I became a preacher myself, and not one in all the revivals during my pastoral life.

The small number of apostasies attending these revivals, I must now add, was owing to the ample instructions given by ministers as to the evidences of grace, and the incessant warnings on the dangers of self-deception. As this is a point of much practical importance, I shall here give some extracts, as a specimen of the manner in which ministers were accustomed to treat these subjects.

The Rev. Asahel Hooker, at the close of a revival among his people, says of the hopeful converts: "They have generally conducted hitherto as well as could reasonably be expected. It is hoped that their religion will not be as the early cloud and the morning dew, that passeth away. But it is greatly to be feared that all will not persevere,—that some will be found with a lamp of profession, but no oil in their lamp. 'Many will say unto me in that day,

Lord, Lord, have we not ate and drank in thy presence?’ to whom he will say, ‘Depart from me, I never knew you.’” Again he says: “Whether all those who appear to have set out, and to run well for the present, will hold on their way, and obtain the prize of their high calling, must be finally known by the event. If some, of whom the best hopes have been entertained, should make shipwreck of the faith, return again to folly, and thus evince that they were never cleansed from their filthiness, it will determine no characters but their own. Some may have deceived both themselves and others, and their last state may be worse than the first.”

The Rev. Jeremiah Hallock, in the same spirit, says: “When I find Peter, an Apostle, deceived in Simon Magus, and hear him, when speaking of the faith of Silvanus, using the cautious language, ‘a faithful brother, as I suppose,’ it makes me tremble for fear how we shall hold out. We cannot tell what shall be on the morrow, and man is ignorant of the heart. Hence my desire is, that all whom I have alluded to in the above narration will remember that this is not an hour of boasting, but of putting on the harness; and that it still remains to be proved from their fruits whether they have true religion or not.”

It were easy to fill pages with similar quotations,

but I will add only one more, from Rev. Joseph Washburn. "I would remark further, with respect to those whose experiences have been now related, and all who entertain a hope, and have been respected in this narrative, that, after all, it is very possible they may be deceived. We speak of them as hopeful converts, and we are bound in charity to do so, while they do not contradict their professions by their external deportment. But the Lord trieth the hearts. Whether their relief from distress and present hopes is the consequence of a renewed, humble heart, or of their being left to blindness and self-deception, must be decided by their conduct, and by the light of the great day. As yet we have not been pained with any instances of special apostasy; but it is not improbable, that, among so many, some may prove to be stony ground hearers. May God, who alone is able, keep them from falling, and strengthen, establish, settle them, that they be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel; and that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

The above extracts are sufficient to show what was the general habit of ministers in warning their hearers against that presumptuous confidence which is the prolific origin of apostasies in revivals. A zeal perhaps equally sincere with theirs, but more

impetuous, may censure the course they pursued as cautious to an extreme. I cannot view this censure as just, while I regard the solid fruits of a revival as consisting in the addition to the church of 'such as shall be saved;' not such as will become apostates and reprobates.

Among the happy fruits of these revivals, the decided tone of practical piety which they produced ought to be mentioned.

It was a common thing that the hopeful converts exhibited a strong desire for improvement in religious knowledge. The time which had been employed by the young in scenes of frivolous amusement, and by the more advanced in idle conversation, was devoted to the study of the Bible and other useful books, and to attendance on meetings designed especially to promote their advancement in intellectual and spiritual knowledge. Under this impulse of religious feeling, the progress actually made by many in a correct understanding of Christian doctrines was greater in one month than it had been during their whole lives. As to the people of my own charge, I cannot speak on this subject without recollections of the most intense interest. From the beginning of my ministry, my attention had been directed towards one standing obstacle to the preacher's success, namely, that the greater

proportion of his hearers come to the sanctuary expecting to be merely passive under his preaching. They calculate to understand and feel only so far as he *compels* them to understand and feel. It would be out of place to dwell on this point, except to mention one of the measures adopted, to transform this class of persons from passive into active hearers of the Gospel. This was a meeting of the young people, once in two weeks, at which each one was at liberty to give in a written composition on some important subject previously assigned, and on which it was my usage previously to preach. When this anticipated sermon was delivered, the aspect of the whole assembly was that of eager listening to the discussion of a subject, on which one or more in a large proportion of the families was expecting to write, in preparation for the public meeting. It must suffice to add (for there is no room for details), that the youthful converts trained in this manner rapidly outstripped, in religious knowledge, the older members of the church. Indeed, they surpassed in their attainments the most sanguine hopes that I had entertained. The habit of active, intelligent attention to preaching, which thus became established in the congregation, particularly the younger part of it, was a subject of special remark to ministers who occasionally preached in my pulpit.



Wherever these revivals prevailed, they were attended by a manifest increase in the religious observance of the Sabbath, and the duties of family religion.

The narrative from Killingly, Conn., says, that, previous to this season, "public worship was greatly neglected by many whole families; but now we see them flocking to hear the Word of God on the Sabbath and at other seasons. In our public meetings the solemnity is like going to the judgment. While there were formerly but very few who called upon the name of the Lord in family prayer, now almost whole neighborhoods have engaged in this duty; so that if one were to pass among them at certain seasons he would be constrained to say,— Surely God is in this place;— parents devoting themselves, their little ones, and all that they have, to the Lord." It was a common testimony of these narratives, that the attention given to family religion was much greater, some of them say "ten times greater," than it had formerly been.

Another memorable fruit of these revivals was seen in the harmony that existed among Christians. I have adverted to two important causes which operated to produce this harmony,— first, the thorough system of doctrinal preaching which prevailed, and by which the churches were prepared to em-

brace those views of evangelical truth which were correct, without falling into angry collision about them, during a revival. And, secondly, the happy, I might say, perhaps, unexampled, agreement of ministers among themselves, as to the proper means of conducting these revivals.

In the great outpouring of the Spirit under the preaching of Whitefield and his associates, families and churches were rent asunder with violent divisions. Wrath, bitterness, and evil speaking were too prevalent among the professed friends of religion, and even among ministers. But as God in his mercy would have it, in the revivals of 1800, &c., things were in a state totally different. Ministers had but one heart and soul. All drank into one spirit, preached one Gospel, and cast their influence into one common stock; each laboring in his own sphere, and still aiming to encourage the heart and strengthen the hands of his brethren in every possible way. Nor did this seem to be any other than a matter of course. I did not dream of heart-burnings and clashing influence among ministers, in revivals too, till I lived to witness these things amid other scenes than those where my happy lot was originally cast. It would be a testimony to the sanctifying power of the Gospel, at once unquestionable and delightful, if I should enumerate

the instances in which stubborn and protracted, and apparently incurable, divisions in school districts, parishes, and towns, and, what is ordinarily the most hopeless form of dissension, the acrimony of political strife, were hushed into tranquillity by a revival of religion. It is enough to say, that contentions, involving individuals and families, and extending often to entire communities, threatening most disastrous consequences, were quietly submerged in the great concerns of the soul and eternity. In many instances, those who had been for years arrayed against each other in the ranks of opposing parties, bowed together before the heart-subduing influence of the Gospel, sat down together as brethren at the table of their common Lord, and found his banner over them to be love.

Another conspicuous trait in the influence of these revivals was, that they taught ministers humility. Those whose labors were most signally blest for the conversion of sinners were the same men who took the lowest place before God in prayer, ascribing all the success of their ministrations to Him. Scarcely was a sermon heard, or an address to the throne of grace, which did not distinctly recognize the sentiment of Paul, — “Neither he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.” One of the most eminent

ministers of that period\* said to me, "I never fully understood the apostle's comparison of ministers to 'earthen vessels,' till I saw, in a revival, the utter inefficacy of my own preaching to save a single soul, without divine influence." Another of them † said, "There is joy and hope in God; and I desire to be thankful to him that he has allowed me to stand and behold his glorious work; though I must confess that I never felt so useless since I entered on the ministry. God hath wrought; and to his name be all the glory." It was in mercy to the churches that the predominant influence in the management of these revivals was among men of this spirit; men who were not disposed to overrate their own instrumentality, and who were qualified to estimate with candor the labors of their brethren. Rash, heady, censorious ministers, if there were such, had no opportunity to become conspicuous. Indeed, during all these wonderful displays of divine mercy, over so great an extent of country and for so long a period, I never heard of a single vainglorious preacher thrusting himself into the sphere of regular pastors, and assuming before their people to be more skilful than they in converting sinners. That man is but little qualified to be a teacher in the church, in seasons of special divine influence, who

\* Rev. Asahel Hooker.

† Rev. Jeremiah Hallock.

has not himself been taught *humility*,—the first lesson of the Gospel.

These revivals illustrate at once the indispensable necessity of means, and the sovereignty of divine grace. As to the first part of this statement, all theories may well be superseded by the simple evidence of facts. What is this evidence? When the Spirit of God comes among a people by his awakening influences, look at the solemn assemblages which throng the sanctuary and the conference room. Look at the unwonted earnestness with which old and young search the Scriptures. Plainly the whole aspect of a congregation is decisive testimony, at such a season, that some strong impulse is moving them to special attendance on means; and this impulse is unquestionably from the Holy Spirit. Hence the individuals who in such a time remain in heedless unconcern about their own salvation, so as to neglect and despise the regular means of grace, bear the stamp of reprobation on their foreheads, and their case, while remaining as they are, is universally regarded as hopeless. Not a single instance appears, in all these narratives, of any person who was apparently converted to God, without a previous, solemn excitement to attend on the means of salvation.

But while this is the ordinary method in which sinners are converted, no promises of regenerating

grace are made to the unregenerate. There is no certain connection between the sanctification of any unholy man, and attendance on means, as he does attend on them; because the promises of the Gospel are made to nothing short of repentance. As the subject of those exercises which usually precede a spiritual renovation, his case may be very hopeful compared with others around him; but all is dreadful uncertainty as to the result. From the most promising stage of such exercises, multitudes have relapsed into a state of deadly apathy or infidelity. Among awakened sinners, God in his sovereignty renews some to eternal life, while he leaves others to perish in their voluntary rejection of the Gospel. Among unawakened sinners, too, the same sovereignty is exercised. Of this, the narratives to which I have so often referred furnish most conclusive evidence. The Rev. Jedidiah Bushnell, in reference to a work of grace in Otsego county, said: "The Angel of God's presence evidently went before the preaching of the Gospel. Only the reading of a text of Scripture, or some sentence from a preacher, would have more effect upon an audience than whole labored discourses in time of religious declension. God held the work in his own hand. Creatures prayed and used means, but God wrought the salvation; to his name be all the glory."

The Rev. Doctor S. Shepard said of the same work in Lenox: "The immediate hand of Omnipotence was strikingly displayed in it. It was preceded by no providential occurrences that were uncommon. Religious instruction was no other now than it had been. The apostle knew what he said when he spoke these memorable words, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.'"

The Rev. Mr. Hallock said: "Dreadful experience proves that men are indeed morally dead. Their hearts are harder than rocks, deaf as adders, and more stubborn than the sturdiest oaks. That which will break down the rocks and tear up the oaks will have no effect on the carnal mind. As means did not begin this work of themselves, so neither did they carry it on. But as this was the work of the Omnipotent Spirit, so the effects produced, proclaimed its sovereign, divine author. One was taken here, and another there,—often where we should least expect it. I have seen some, under the most awakening judgments, as thoughtless as ever,—others in full health and prosperity pricked in the heart."

The Rev. Mr. Hooker said: "It is the evident design of Providence to confound all attempts, which should be made by philosophy and human reason, to

account for the effects wrought, without ascribing them to God, as the marvellous work of his Spirit and grace. The effects were not only such in themselves as made it impossible to account for them by any of the known principles of human nature, or the influence of natural causes ; but such a diversity in the antecedent characters, habits, and circumstances of the subjects, renders this still further impossible."

The history of these revivals shows that the genuine tendency of such seasons is to render Christians grateful, watchful, and fervent in spirit. Many, doubtless, must be viewed as sincere Christians who are not consistent Christians. The wise and the foolish slumber together, while the bridegroom tarries. But when the Redeemer comes in the triumphs of his grace to visit his churches, then his true followers are seen waking from their apathy, and going forth to welcome the King of Zion with an energy and earnestness and ardor of affection greatly surpassing their first love. Then, too, it is seen that the highest fervor of experimental religion, instead of being forced only among the weak and illiterate, is often associated with intellectual strength of the first order. As a proof that such fervor may be entirely distinct from fanatical excitement, I would gladly insert here two letters, which passed between Judge Reeve of Connecticut and Judge Boudinot of



New Jersey, both in the full maturity of their powers, and well entitled to the high rank which they held, even among the educated men of their time. But my limits allow me only to give a few extracts from the reply of the latter to some inquiries from the former, it being a time of revival in the places where they severally resided. These extracts, while they rebuke the languor of lukewarm Christians, give a testimony (incidental indeed, and therefore the more valuable) respecting the judicious order maintained in the church at Newark, to which the writer belonged.

“Although a large number gave sufficient evidence of a real change of heart, before December, yet none of them came forward;—as great strictness and caution are observed with us. On the first Sabbath in March, the Lord’s supper was administered again. Of those who had been previously propounded, ninety-seven appeared and joined the church. It was one of the most solemn days I ever experienced. The house was crowded; at least two thousand people were in it, and upwards of five hundred communicants. Twenty-two adults and eight infants were baptized. We expect at least one hundred more will join the church on the first Sabbath in June; there are at least as many more under convictions; and, blessed be God, we have no reason

to think that the work has ceased. Surely this is wonder and love indeed, beyond degree; wonder without end to angels, and love without bounds to men. How should the praises of this adorable Messiah live upon each believing heart and ascend from every redeemed tongue! The believer's very silence, as well as his voice, should praise him; and when his tongue is not heard, his life should be more than eloquent, and declare by the most convincing argument the glories of the great Immanuel. Let Christians, as prisoners of hope, fly to their strong-hold. Blessed be God, there is a covert from the storm; and though his wrath is shaking, and will shake, our guilty globe, his people are safe in that covert. Let us then say from the heart, Come, Lord Jesus! come quickly, let what will become of our worthless names. Whether we meet in this world or not, I trust and hope, that, through the sovereign, unmerited love of our glorious head, we shall meet each other, washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness, in that place of rest prepared for his people, where it is blessedness enough to know that we shall be like him."

No reader of this letter, I presume, will wish me to apologize for the length of this extract, which brings to view two such laymen, of the last generation, amid the severe pressure of official engage-

ments, corresponding about a revival. Venerable Christian friends! they have met in their eternal rest above, and know by actual fruition, the blessedness of being like Christ. I hope that I may add, without offence to any one, that the value of such papers, as permanent statistics of the church to be read by survivors, is very different from that of ephemeral letters, written by young men and women, purporting to be accounts of revivals, and too often published by Christian editors under the head of religious intelligence.

All that now remains, gentlemen, to complete the plan which I proposed to adopt in these letters, is to make some general remarks, in view of the facts which have been stated. This I shall do, with leave of Providence, at a convenient opportunity. In the mean time I remain very affectionately yours.

## LETTER VI.

GENTLEMEN, — In examining the narratives of those glorious revivals, with which God was pleased to visit our churches at the commencement of this century, my chief difficulty has been that of selection. The brevity which I at first prescribed to myself, it soon became apparent, would be inconsistent with any adequate view of the main facts and principles which came within the range of observation. To the historical sketch of these facts and principles, which I have aimed to give with fidelity, I shall now subjoin some general remarks. In these, special regard will be had to my younger brethren in the ministry, and to the members of our beloved Seminary, who expect soon to become guides to souls. Should the opinions which I shall now express, on any doctrinal or practical points, contravene the views of others, they will, I trust, be weighed with candor; and only so far as they are found to be scriptural and reasonable are they entitled to any regard.

My first remark is, that revivals of religion exhibit the sovereignty of God in its true light, as connected with the best encouragement to fidelity in Christian ministers.

There is a kind of Antinomian orthodoxy, which abuses the doctrine of divine sovereignty by so representing man's dependence on it as virtually to excuse him from all obligation to obey the Gospel. A minister who believes that there is no independent efficacy in means to convert sinners may gradually transmute this unquestionable truth into error; and may preach as though he believed God to be in such a sense a sovereign, that there is no connection whatever between a faithful, powerful exhibition of the truth, and the sanctification of men's hearts. Such views, doubtless, he may honestly cherish, from reverence to God; but they tend to paralyze his own ministrations, and to spread the slumber of death over his hearers.

There is, on the other hand, a presumptuous orthodoxy, which virtually denies the sovereignty of God; and maintains that every faithful preacher will certainly be successful in converting his hearers. The ground really taken is, that the result depends entirely on human instrumentality, and not at all on the sovereignty of God. This tends to cherish ministerial pride and vainglory when success is

granted, and utter discouragement when it is withheld.

What, then, do we mean by God's being a sovereign? Not that he acts in any case without reason; but that he acts without disclosing the reason to us. He acts as a sovereign, too, where he is at liberty as to his own promise, or as to the immutable principles of rectitude, to do the thing or not to do it. A sinner repents. God is not a sovereign in forgiving that sinner. He is bound to do it by his Word. God sustains his church, so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; but he is bound by promise to do this. So it is never said, "Whom he will he justifieth, and whom he will he condemneth," because the justification of a believer is a judicial proceeding, governed by principles entirely distinct from sovereignty. But effectual calling stands on the footing of strict sovereignty; so that here, "he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." When it is said, then, that a "faithful preacher of the truth will certainly be successful," some explanation is needed. Is it meant that the truth by its own inherent efficacy will convert sinners? Then no interposition of divine sovereignty is required. Or has God promised to give his truth this converting efficacy, whenever it is faithfully preached? Still he acts

not as a sovereign, but as he has bound himself to act.

What do we mean by a faithful preacher? Certainly not that he is a perfect man or a perfect pulpit orator. Not that he preaches as much truth in one sermon as Paul sometimes did; nor that he preaches as many thousand sermons, and with as overpowering an eloquence, as Whitefield did. But that he preaches the gospel clearly and earnestly, though perhaps with subordinate powers of impression.

And what is meant by his being successful? Not that all his impenitent hearers will be converted under one sermon, nor in one year, nor in the whole course of his ministry. Let us decide how faithful we mean, and how successful; and then say what is the ground of certainty that so much fidelity will be attended with so much success. We must find this certainly either in the state of the human heart and the nature of truth, or in the promise of God. But it is to be found in neither. All we can properly say is, that the general current of the Bible, and of Divine Providence, holds out a high probability that decided faithfulness in preaching the gospel will be attended with a good measure of success. It is a probability, such as is deemed an adequate encouragement to earnest endeavors, in

husbandry, in medicine, in all cases where means are to be employed. The faithful preacher, then, may labor in hope, nay, it is his duty to labor in high and animated hope, that God will bless his efforts to the salvation of some perishing souls. Still, his hope is in that sovereign mercy which has promised to render the gospel effectual to the conversion of multitudes of our lost race, but has not promised to convert all his hearers or any of them. This places him between despondency and presumption; just the condition to call forth the powers of a Christian minister to the best advantage. If he supposed himself able to convert his hearers at any time, or at any time able to bring God under the obligation of a promise to convert them, he might sink into remissness. But while the question is, "can these dry bones live?" and the only answer is, "O Lord God, thou knowest," the faithful pastor, in his deep solicitude for dying sinners, will proclaim the warnings of the gospel with no less earnestness, and with much more hope of success, than if his sole reliance for their salvation were on himself.

The gospel is the power of God to salvation just so far as he is pleased to render it so by his Spirit. To many it is "the savor of death unto death," not through any fault of the preacher, but



through their own stubborn depravity. The wicked man may be faithfully warned, and yet die in his iniquity; but his blood will be upon himself, and not upon the watchman. Though Israel be not gathered, the faithful prophet will have his reward; every syllable of truth that he utters will glorify God as really "in them that perish" as in "them that are saved."

My second remark, which stands in close connection with the foregoing, is, that the special blessing of God usually attends only that kind of preaching which exhibits in due connection, the accountability of sinners, and their dependence on divine grace.

This is a grand characteristic of revival preaching, that it bears down upon the conscience of the sinner, with the solemn claims of the gospel to "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling," while it shows him that it is "God who worketh in him to will and to do, of his good pleasure." The preaching that does neither of these, or that does one and not the other, is radically wanting in pungency and power. And this is just the defect which renders nugatory a large proportion of pulpit discourses.

You are soon to become ambassadors for Christ. Suppose you should tell sinners that they are under a law, modified and mitigated now from its original

strictness to suit their fallen condition; that the gospel regards men as wretched rather than as guilty; that it is their duty to exercise godly sorrow, not for their depravity, but for their deplorable impotence to do any thing which God requires. You tell them to do the best they can; to wait God's time, relying on his help when it is sincerely sought. You put them on a round of external duties, in each of which there is confessedly no obedience of the heart, and in respect to each of which they may comply with your directions in every punctilio, and yet perish eternally. Now, who has authorized you to instruct dying sinners in this manner? to represent their dependence on God as being such, that, if they do perish, the blame will be upon him and not upon themselves? If there is no preaching in our time which avowedly takes this ground, there is too much which approaches it so far as to neutralize the force of obligation to immediate repentance, by administering a deadly quietus to conscience.

But suppose you fall into another extreme (for there is another), and devote one half of your time in the pulpit to prove that sinners have power to repent. Is it preaching the whole Gospel to inculcate so laboriously what Christ and the apostles never preached, but always took for granted? Look through the sermon on the Mount and the Pentecost

sermon of Peter, and what proportion of either is occupied with this discussion? Not one word. You convince a man by conclusive argument (what indeed he knows by his mere consciousness, without any argument), that he is a free agent,— is he therefore a Christian? Not at all. You have not instructed him in the great truths of the gospel, and he may believe all you have said, and perish; nay, may perish because he believes, contrary to your intention, that this is the whole gospel. For though he admits fully your main proposition, that he is a free agent and has power to repent, his own false logic of heart infers that it is as easy for just such a sinner as he is to repent, as to remain impenitent; and thence again that just such a sinner (notwithstanding his utter aversion to holiness) is as likely, of his own accord, to repent, as to remain impenitent; nay, much more likely, as an infinite preponderance of motives on that side must prevail with a free moral agent. Of course, he need not be anxious; for a work so easy to be accomplished at any moment may be safely postponed for the present. This belief, therefore, is a practical falsehood,—because the Bible says, and experience says, that multitudes throng the broad way against light and evidence and warnings; while few enter the narrow way, and live. His belief is also a fatal falsehood

in its result. It leaves him to rest in impenitence because he believes but a part of the truth.

Now give him true instruction, that he cannot misunderstand, by showing him the simple distinction between natural and moral inability. Preach to him his own complete powers of moral agency, and his obligation to immediate repentance. Then show him another truth, which does not extenuate his guilt, but aggravates it to immeasurable criminality, namely, that he is opposed to God, and never will submit, unless sovereign grace shall interpose to subdue his opposition. The man now feels himself to be in solemn circumstances. You load him down with responsibility, guilt, danger,—a triple weight that crushes him and makes him cry out. Conscience shows him that his wickedness is to be charged not upon Adam or Satan or God, but upon his own single self. Conscience kindles a hell in his bosom; and the Bible shows him a hell flaming beneath his feet. Preach both obligation and dependence, then, if you would transform careless sinners into anxious, trembling inquirers.

My third remark is, that any system of means for the promotion of religion which will supersede or essentially impair the influence of a regular, local ministry, must ultimately be deleterious to the churches.

In the apostolical age, it was indispensable that the few men to whom was committed the work of evangelizing the world should be travelling preachers. Their first object, however, was to establish local churches, with permanent pastors. On the benefits of this system, so worthy of divine wisdom, so adapted to attach the preacher's affections to his hearers and theirs to him, and to promote a discriminating, profitable discharge of his duties, I cannot dwell. The happy results of this system have been most conspicuous in those parts of our country where revivals of religion have most prevailed; and where many an anxious sinner has valued beyond all price the privilege of opening his heart in private to a beloved pastor.

No organization, though devised by God himself, can be expected to operate in our depraved world, without some difficulties. These are so obvious in the present case, that they need not be suggested. But that will be a day of calamity to our churches, should such a day come, when they shall be willing to exchange a stated pastorate for itinerant and occasional ministrations. It would sacrifice what the Head of the church has established as the vital principle of her prosperity. It would strike away the main pillars of the edifice, that incidental props may occupy their place. Just see what would become of

ministerial responsibility, when the same man should preach but once or a few times to a congregation. How could he know their spiritual wants, or secure their affections, or feel the full obligation of watching for their souls, when his only intercourse with them is the transient sight of their faces from the pulpit? What would become of the whole machinery of sabbath schools, and Bible classes, and benevolent associations, which can be kept in operation only by the influence of a constant pastoral supervision?

What would become of the pulpit? If it were practicable that itinerant ministrations should secure for it in all our towns a permanent and perpetual supply, yet the plan would transform the whole character of public preaching. Hearers would become fond of novelty, fastidious and capricious in taste. Preachers would cease to be men of study, and, instead of being instructive, would become discursive and declamatory in their sermons. Of necessity, their preaching must be not appropriate, but indefinite and general.

Perhaps you may ask me, to what extent may evangelists be employed as assistants to stated pastors, or as substitutes for them? I answer: in a large congregation, where the ordinary labors of the ministry are as great as one man can possibly sus-

tain, a failure of his health, or a revival among his people, may render it indispensable that he should have help in his work for weeks or months successively. Such help has often been furnished by the occasional labors of other pastors, who have had a short leave of absence from their own flocks. But perhaps the only adequate provision for such emergencies would be, that a few men, of rare endowments for this particular service, — men of God, distinguished for judgment, fervor of piety and suavity of temper, — should be held in reserve to labor where they are most needed, as assistants to stated pastors. These men, of course, should be ordained ministers, and hold themselves accountable to some regular ecclesiastical body.

About the close of the period which I attempted to describe in former letters, the Rev. Asahel Nettleton devoted himself to the work of an evangelist. With his eminent qualifications for this work and usefulness in it, I presume you to be already well acquainted. The fact, however, which it is especially to my present purpose to mention, and which probably many of you do not know, is, that this distinguished itinerant found no difficulty to labor as an assistant of stated pastors, without making himself their rival. If in any instance he could not conscientiously coincide in the views, or coöperate in the

measures, of a pastor among whose charge he was invited to labor, he did not sow dissension in that church, nor seek to detach their affections from their minister; but quietly withdrew to another place. The consequence was that the visits of this devoted servant of Christ were always sought, and never dreaded nor regretted by ministers or churches. But the signal success of his ministrations has called forth many others to labor in the same department, concerning some of whom, if we must admit that they have done good, we cannot but doubt whether they have not done much more harm. When invited to assist a stated pastor, or thrusting themselves forward without invitation, they have been heady, sanguine, censorious; have aimed to subvert the influence of a Christian pastor with the restless spirits of his own church, and perhaps in a few days have planted the seeds of mischief that have sprung up in years of subsequent calamity. If I must say when and where a radically indiscreet man should preach the Gospel, I would say never, nowhere. But if he must preach, then confine him to one spot (where, if he kindles a blaze, it may perhaps consume his own hay, wood, and stubble), instead of sending him to scatter firebrands in all the churches.

As to the substitution of evangelists for stated pastors, I have already expressed the opinion that it is



always undesirable when it can be avoided. Candidates for the ministry are a kind of evangelists, and their services must be employed by vacant churches in search of pastors. Churches may be so feeble, too, that they must be satisfied with occasional ministrations of the word because they cannot have stated pastors.

Perhaps you may further inquire, How far may occasional or extraordinary means of religious excitement be relied on as a substitute for the regular, divinely appointed means of grace?

To this question, in its broad extent, I must answer, and every one must answer, Not at all. For any institution that is plainly of divine appointment there can be no proper substitute. Any human arrangement, for example, that supersedes the Christian Sabbath, or that prevents the regular worship of local churches, or the regular influence of local ministers, on that day, is an assumption that we are wiser than God. In some of the thinly peopled districts of the South and West, where ministers are few and pluralities are unavoidable, it may be best that several congregations should remain together at a protracted meeting over the Sabbath. On sacramental occasions, such meetings have always been customary among the scattered Christians of these regions. But in the compact settlements of the

country to admit any principle which should frustrate the meeting of each congregation with its own pastor on the Sabbath, because we presume that more sinners would be converted by bringing six of these congregations with their pastors into one great assembly on that day, is to exalt a hypothetical theory of our own above a settled usage of the church, founded on apostolic authority. What if more conversions should take place on that single day; does this prove the measure to be wise in the long run? Perhaps ten times as many conversions may ultimately be prevented by this same measure. It is presumption to try our experiments on any rule of action which comes from God.

But I must not be misunderstood. There are limits within which Christian discretion is at liberty to try experiments as to the best means of promoting the conversion of sinners. To this head belong conferences, Bible classes, and the whole routine of occasional exercises, which pastoral enterprise has brought into operation in aid of revivals. And I will take this opportunity to say, that extraordinary means, such as protracted meetings, may be, under the blessing of God and the guidance of Christian wisdom, eminently proper. It were unreasonable in me to doubt this, after the blessed results of such meetings which I have witnessed in the North and South;

and the ample testimony on the same point given by not a few of our best ministers. Nor is it difficult to see how the concentrated and prolonged attention of a large assembly, given to the truths of the Gospel day after day, and given without interruption from worldly cares, should be adapted to make deep impressions on the hearers. The principle involved in this case is not a new one. In various forms it has been resorted to in all past revivals, though not carried to so great extent as it has been of late. Protracted meetings, then, if properly conducted, have my most cordial approbation; and I am anxious to say this the more distinctly to prevent misapprehension of subsequent remarks.

These meetings are certainly very liable to abuses, which it is the special province of ministers to guard against; and concerning which all their wisdom and experience should be thrown into common stock. On some of these abuses I shall express my views with perfect frankness, under a following head. At present let me say, that a vital principle to be remembered in giving the highest efficacy to these meetings is, that they should be regarded as strictly extraordinary means. In different places they have been repeated, with various degrees of success; and the experience of the churches will decide how often this can properly

be done. Probably it has already decided that the repetition ought not to be frequent.

To return to my third remark so discursively treated: — let protracted meetings never supersede the stated, ordinary means of grace. Let them not disturb the customary worship of the Sabbath, nor impede the regular action of a local ministry. Let churches beware that they do not contract a false taste for preaching from love of novelty and excitement; and after having heard a few extra sermons, complain of ordinary discourses, such as their own pastors can prepare amid the pressing engagements of a revival. And let them beware, too, that their religion does not degenerate into mere alternations of zeal and apathy. Let ministers be cautious not to encourage among their people the expectation of only ephemeral revivals, to last but a few days; and shall I add, as a suggestion specially applicable to some parts of our country, let them be cautious whom they introduce to their people as itinerant, revival preachers, — for such strangers are not always “angels unawares.”\*

\* In illustration of the foregoing sentiments, I will take the liberty of introducing an extract from the report of the Synod of Geneva, adopted at its session, October 4, 1832. This document is so full of instruction to the churches, that it deserves the solemn attention of at least every minister. After glancing over

My fourth remark is, that, in revivals of religion, great wisdom is requisite on the part of ministers

the favorable aspects of the past year, and contrasting them with the powerful and general revivals of the year before, the report proceeds thus: But, according to the facts now before us, these indications of the power and presence of God during the present year are lamentably few. In several of the Presbyteries there is not now a single revival. In some churches division exists. When religious excitements have existed during the present year, they have quickly subsided: the light was only for a moment. Having taken a step or two forth and onward last year, the churches now seem to hesitate, waver, and almost stand still. Conformity to an ungodly world prevails. The sordid, strait-hearted inquiry, "who will show us any good?" is heard from the followers of Jesus. But the inquiry, "Men and brethren, what must we do to be saved?" has almost ceased. A zeal, not of God's house, but of this world, hath eaten us up.

Every Christian wishes to pause here, and ask what cause or causes have operated to produce such a depression of religion the present year, such a discouraging apathy and worldliness, such a departure of the Spirit of God. — God has not changed; why is he not among us in power and mercy? Sinners are yet in their sins; why do they not come to Christ? The Holy Ghost is still Almighty: why are they not convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment? There is nothing in the nature of a revival to prevent its continuance; why are not all our churches still rejoicing in the manifestations of God's power? There is positive wrong, positive wickedness, somewhere.

The reports of our presbyteries to-day have developed some of the causes of this state of things. Of the ministers of this synod,

and other Christians, in the treatment of those who are anxious, and those who have recently entertained hopes of their own conversion.

The practical difficulty of this subject and the different views which good men entertain respecting

fifty-two only are pastors, sixty-one are stated supplies. It also appears that there is among us a continual change of ministers, a continual settling and unsettling. These stated instead of pastoral supplies, and this change of place among the ministers of this synod, disclose to us a great evil, and great wickedness attaching to the churches, and perhaps to the ministers: these facts show us that there may be in the churches false professors, who, not doing the work of God, become disturbers of the peace; that there must be persons of unstable and uninstructed minds having itching ears; restless spirits, loving whatever is new and peculiar better than the truth of God, which is eternally the same. These facts show that there may be ministers also too indolent or too uneducated to furnish themselves for the pulpit beyond a sixth months' or one year's stock, who encourage this unstable, fluctuating state of things. In consequence of this, the great and glorious doctrines of the Bible are not systematically and fully preached and heard. And some of our church-members, especially the recent converts, being without instruction, are unsound in the faith. In some instances the additions sit like an incubus on the heart and energies of the churches. Here is one cause of the present lamentable state of things among us.

The reports of presbyteries develop another cause by exhibiting the fact, that, with a few exceptions, the spirit of benevolence has by no means increased in proportion to the increase of our churches. This failure of a benevolent spirit deprives us

it will render it proper for me to express my own opinions more explicitly and at length than I have already done. As preparatory to this, I shall give a

of this divine blessing, without which all is desolation. God will not water those who neglect to water others.

Another fact reported is, that religious excitements have rapidly declined as soon as special means are withdrawn, indicating that human instrumentality was made too prominent, and too much trusted in, to the exclusion of the Spirit and power of God, and the simple exhibition of divine truth. God, having been overlooked, has overlooked us. In the effort to bless ourselves, we have lost the blessing of heaven. Attempting in our pride and confidence to work our own deliverance, the Almighty arm has been withdrawn from us. Having lightly esteemed the influences of the Holy Ghost, we have been left without it, to go on in darkness in our own chosen way.

If we would see the Lord God walking among us again in glory and power; if we would be blessed again and refreshed, our ministers must remain in their places, and study, and study, and study! They must preach systematically and fully the whole counsel of God, and feed their people with knowledge and understanding. And the churches must be disciplined. Dead branches must be broken off. They must be satisfied to hear from the same man the pure, plain doctrines of the Bible, if he is a man of God. We must all use the instrumentality of God's appointment with vastly more diligence and constancy. But not trusting in these to save sinners, we must, above all, and more than all, acknowledge God and the power of his Spirit as the only agent able to overcome the deep aversion of sinners to all good, and make them submissive to his will.

few extracts from printed accounts of revivals which occurred chiefly in 1831, premising that these accounts purport to be written by ministers, that they relate to places in six different States, and that I avoid giving names, because some inconvenience might attend it, without any advantage.

During a protracted meeting which is described at some length, the writer of the account says, that "two hundred manifested hopes." Another similar account says, "On the second day of the meeting, the *converts* and the anxious were called on to separate themselves from the rest of the congregation." — Another says, "Last Sabbath I attended a camp-meeting at B——. The meeting was very orderly and solemn, and thirty-one professed to indulge hope." Another closes the account of a protracted meeting thus: "The number of conversions is sixty." Respecting a similar meeting in M——, the account says: "On Saturday, an awful solemnity was on the assembly. Sabbath morning, three persons gave themselves away to Christ, and were admitted to the church."

"At a protracted meeting in D——, on the last day at noon, those who hoped they had experienced a change of heart during the meeting were requested to signify it, and about forty arose. Others were led to rejoice in hope in the afternoon." "In



M——, on the last day of our protracted meeting, about fifty professed to have passed from death to life." In a town where no previous revival had prevailed, "A protracted meeting began on Monday. On the following Saturday, the Session examined twenty-one, all of whom were next day admitted to the church."

It is needless to multiply extracts. If you have carefully read the printed statements of revivals for a year or two past, you must have observed that many of these statements, especially concerning protracted meetings, speak of anxious persons, and also of converts, or, as they are sometimes designated, "those who entertain hope of their own conversion since the meeting began," as being called upon publicly to separate themselves from the rest of the assembly. Before I make remarks on the expediency of these measures, a few queries of a distinct character arise respecting a protracted meeting that occurred during the past year, and the particular description of which was copied into many of our periodical papers. A mere abstract of this description is sufficient to exhibit the principal facts. "On the first day, Mr. ——, the preacher, said, at the close of his sermon,—‘The Gospel offer is designed to produce an immediate decision.’ Then he called upon all who were *determined now*

*to attend to their soul's welfare* to retire to the lecture room for conversation and prayer. Near two hundred went. On the second day near four hundred were in the anxious meeting. The invitation then given was, 'All who are *determined now to yield their hearts to God* are requested to kneel down as subjects of prayer.' About two thirds of the assembly kneeled, and prayer was made. A similar request being made on a subsequent day, when there were about three hundred anxious, one hundred and fifty kneeled in token of their determination then to cast themselves on God's mercy in Christ Jesus. On a still later day, the determination was expressed by about two hundred to become the servants of Jesus Christ. On the last day, if I mistake not, about four hundred assembled in the anxious room; the converts being called on to separate themselves from the anxious, about one third declared themselves converts."

During the successive days of this meeting, a number of ministers took part in the exercises.

Now, I would be slow to condemn any work in which devoted and excellent ministers of Christ are engaged, and especially in which there is evidence that God is present by the influences of his Spirit. Nor would I censure any measures merely because they are new, for this does not prove them to be

wrong ; it rather suggests a good reason why we should inquire with candor and caution as to the evidence alleged that they are right. Nor do I regard with the same degree of solicitude which some good men have felt, the danger of excitement on these occasions. The greatest possible danger to souls is a deadly insensibility. When the house is on fire and the family are asleep, better that they be awakened by violence than consumed. Better rouse them, even if it were at the expense of a momentary insanity, than let them die. Every preacher of the Gospel knows how very difficult it is to gain even the serious attention of careless men to the subject of religion. This is just the point on which occasional and special means, judiciously employed, may be advantageously brought in to the aid of ordinary means. Now and then such special exercises will help to break up the lethargy of the soul, and awaken intense interest in the concerns of religion.

Worldly men allow and demand excitement in the orator, the poet, the statesman, the warrior ; any man may be ardent on any subject but religion ; while on this subject they denounce fervor as fanaticism. But how can a subject that properly fills all heaven with emotion be properly regarded without emotion on earth ? Let excitement come, not from

appeals to the passions, but from clear and vivid exhibitions of divine truth, and one most formidable obstacle to the salvation of sinners is removed.

With these remarks in view, let us come to the facts stated above. What does the Gospel require that sinners, under the excitements of an awakened conscience, shall do? That they shall repent; not that they shall purpose to repent, or promise to repent, but—repent. When must they repent? *Now*. If you turn back to the extracts last given, and examine the clauses printed in *Italic*, you will see the ground of my scruples as to some prevalent modes of preaching. “All who are determined now to yield their hearts to God,” &c. The preacher, on a former occasion, had spoken of the Gospel as demanding “an immediate decision.” What decision? Why, to think on religion seriously; to “attend now to their souls’ welfare.” All this, doubtless, is well intended, but it is not the apostolic way of pressing immediate obligation. The language is equivocal and vague on a point where the New Testament is perfectly explicit. A serious inquirer might ask, — How much does the preacher mean by my determining “to become the servant of Jesus Christ?” determining “now to yield my heart to God?” Does he mean that by so determining I do now exercise true repentance? or merely that I

resolve to become a penitent? If the latter, I can kneel, &c., for I do thus determine. But if he had said, "All who do at this moment exercise true repentance for sin are requested to kneel," &c., I should not dare to do it, for I have not sufficient evidence that I do now exercise a penitent heart.

The practical difficulty, and it is very serious, lies here: some men are in the habit of exhorting their hearers "to an immediate decision," — "to make up their minds now," &c., — yet leave it uncertain whether they mean a decision that implies the actual present surrender of the heart to God by repentance, or a decision to make religion now the subject of their solemn attention, &c. But betwixt the two things there is an infinite difference. One secures the salvation of the soul; the other leaves it exposed to eternal death. Now if we preach the Gospel as the apostles did, impenitent men cannot do what we exhort them to do, and yet perish.

But there is a greater difficulty still. "The converts being called on to separate themselves from the anxious, about one third declared themselves converts." So in another case: "The second day of the meeting, the converts and the anxious were called on to separate themselves," &c.

What I object to in these proceedings is, that sinners are encouraged to entertain premature hopes;

that they are encouraged to proclaim these hopes ; and that these hopes, true or false, are confirmed by the influence of ministers and churches.

I. The hopes are premature. The settlement of our controversy with God is a business of awful moment. It respects our whole past life, and our whole eternity to come. The work may be done in a moment, and God may see it to be done effectually ; but the proof to ourselves and to other men that it is done, is not the work of a moment nor of a day. A man on Monday is a careless sinner. He listens to preaching. On Tuesday he thinks himself converted. What is the evidence ? None at all, — none, I mean, that is adequate to the momentous importance of the case. The existence of such evidence is impossible. No voice from heaven has announced the fact ; — if it is a fact, omniscience only can know it ; — for the ordinary principles of evidence cannot reach the case. There has not been time for this ; the circumstances do not allow it. The man has been under strong excitement, such excitement as I have said is properly brought to bear on the unawakened conscience. But it certainly is not safe for him to determine, under this state of mind, that he is a Christian. This requires opportunity for calm thought, reading, and examination into his own heart, and the evidences of grace. He may be truly

born again, and yet be ignorant as a child respecting the proper evidences of this change.

Of course, 2. If it is premature for him so soon to indulge a hope, it is still more so to proclaim it. Why should he be called upon to "declare himself a convert," while it is impossible that the evidence of this can be such as ought to be satisfactory to his own mind? The measure is full of awful hazard to his soul, without any imaginable advantage. When an indiscriminate call is given to a public assembly for the "converts" of a protracted meeting to separate themselves from others, it requires but little acquaintance with revivals and with men to know that the confident, the ignorant, and the sanguine will be first in responding to the call; while the judicious, the modest, and the heart-broken will stand back from so sudden and public an exhibition of themselves.

3. Another difficulty is that these hopes, true or false, are confirmed by the influence of ministers and churches. I speak of that class of individuals described above who are publicly called upon "to declare themselves converts." In doing this, the understanding is that they are regarded by the minister as converts; and thence the inference is easy and almost certain on their part that they are converts. But what is the minister's proof of their being so? He

may have found, amid the hurry and excitement of a protracted meeting, opportunity for momentary conversations with them ; but the sum of the whole evidence is that they have a hope. This ought, indeed, to imply that there is some valid ground of hope, but cannot itself be that ground. Of itself, the hope is not the proper evidence that they are converted, nor any part of that evidence.\* A man

\* There are some striking cases in which the most substantial evidence of real conversion is given by those who have no hope in their own case. At the last interview, if I mistake not, which I was permitted to have with that eminent servant of Christ, the late Rev. Jeremiah Hallock, whose name is often repeated in the foregoing pages, he gave me the following statement.

“During a powerful revival in Hartford, I called on Rev. Nathan Strong. While he was absent for a little time after my arrival, I fell into conversation with a young lady of his family about the state of religion among the people, and about her own feelings on the subject. Her remarks in respect to her own heart, and the way of salvation, gave me very satisfactory evidence that she had become a subject of renewing grace, though she indulged no hope respecting herself. When Dr. Strong returned from his visits, and spoke of those concerning whom he thought there was hopeful evidence of a saving change, he mentioned this young lady in his own house as one of the number, though she saw no ground of hope in her own experience. I told him that I had conversed with her, and did not at all regret this want of self-confidence, for I had often found it to be among the best evidences of genuine conversion. A father and his son, said I, were digging a well. The son had descended into it to prosecute the work,



hopes that he shall be rich, or shall live to old age ; is this any proof that he will be rich, or will live to old age ? The foolish virgins had a hope ; but they had no oil in their lamps. “ Many will say, Lord, Lord, open unto us,” who will be shut out of heaven.

What, then, is the minister’s evidence that these individuals are converted ? They hope it is so ; and he hopes because they do ; while, in the case supposed, it is impossible that they or he should have such evidence as the nature of the subject demands, to authorize this hope. And yet, as if the minister could judge of hearts by intuition, without liability to mistake, or as if mistake on a subject of eternal moment must be harmless, these persons are announced as “ converts,” without the epithet “ hopeful,” or any adjunct denoting the necessity of caution in judgment. Indeed, any language imply-

when the sides of the well caved in, and covered him with timbers and rubbish. The father, after a moment of agony, cried out, ‘ My son, are you alive ? — My son, are you alive ? ’ — ‘ No, sir,’ was the answer from beneath. It was enough ; it was evidence of life which the father desired. Now, said Mr. Hallock to me,—“ During my experience in revivals, I have often found that a man who is but recently born of the Spirit, would often say, ‘ No, Sir,’ should you ask him if he is converted. And yet I may have much better evidence of his real change than I have of another, who has an early and confident hope.”

ing caution, danger of false hopes, &c., is profess-  
edly, not to say contemptuously, discarded from the  
vocabulary of some in these times who glory in  
being called revival preachers. Perhaps they may  
have seen some good men who carried caution to  
excess, but does this justify a heedless, undiscrim-  
inating procedure in themselves? A few fanatical  
men in the time of Edwards, and at other periods  
of religious excitement, have professed to decide  
whether any one is a Christian by hearing him  
speak a few words, or even by looking in his face.  
But Christian sobriety and common sense demand  
evidence in judging of ourselves or others. If this  
is a needless scrupulosity, why did the apostles  
incessantly repeat their admonitions against self-  
deception? "Examine yourselves whether ye be  
in the faith." — "Prove your own selves." — "Be  
watchful." Why did they exhort individuals to  
keep up this humble, devout self-inspection through  
life, and exhort churches to beware of false pro-  
fessors, if it is sufficient evidence of a man's piety  
that he entertains a hope? Why did Christ utter  
his solemn parable about the wise and the foolish  
builder, if there is no danger that men will build on  
the sand.

But on the supposition that individuals do enter-  
tain hopes, and unite with the church prematurely,

in what does the danger consist? I answer, it is twofold; — as it respects themselves, and as it respects the church.

1. As it respects themselves. It puts their eternal interests in imminent and needless jeopardy; because it surely need not be proved that a sinner, if he has a groundless hope of heaven, is in far greater danger of perishing than if he had no hope. Here I must be permitted to add more brief extracts from accounts given by ministers, as I wish it to be understood that I am not speaking at random. “A sick man was made the subject of special prayer by the people of God; he was convicted and converted, and shortly died.” Christ says, “By their fruits shall ye know them;” and what were the fruits? — “converted and shortly died.” Probably the man lived long enough to learn that the minister had assumed the dread responsibility of pronouncing him converted! Again: “Within a few moments after their own conversion, fervent cries were offered by these individuals for their unconverted companions.” Here must have been intuitive knowledge of hearts! Again: “The Lord is working gloriously here; within a little more than a week twenty conversions have taken place.” Again: “The two following days of the protracted meeting were distinguished by frequent and sudden

conversions." Language of this sort has been common, in which the number of conversions occurring within a specified number of days, before the account was written, is stated with the same confidence that we use in telling how many members there are in our own family, or how many persons of our neighborhood have died in a week.

Now, lay these facts together, and look at results. On the last day of a protracted meeting, at a call from the pulpit to that effect, ninety persons "declare themselves converts." Within a few days, perhaps the next day, they see in the newspaper the statement of their pastor announcing them as "the converts of that meeting." And suppose still (as the case certainly may be), that God sees twenty or forty of the ninety to be utter aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. I ask,—and the judgment-day will give the answer,—who is responsible for the consequences? These immortal souls take it for granted, perhaps, that they are Christians, and blindly cleave to this hope in defiance of all evidence to the contrary, till their eyes are opened in eternity. The most decisive objection that I have always felt to the camp-meetings of our Methodist brethren is the indiscriminate manner in which men and women are announced as converts in the prayers and addresses of ministers. For all the universe I would not be

accountable for the false hopes which I fear are sometimes thus produced in a single day. And yet, from ample documents now before me, I am constrained to think that irregularities, under the name of revival measures, to some of which there is no room here to advert, have been carried to a most preposterous and presumptuous extreme in many of our Presbyterian and Congregational churches. In too many cases the aim has manifestly been to produce excitement, not by clear exhibitions of truth, but by rousing the passions through continued and violent appeals, that often amount to little more than vociferation. The fault is not in producing emotion, for this God requires; but in presuming all high emotion to be such as he requires. Whereas emotion without conviction, without light, without contrition, is not religious feeling, any more than are the thunder and the wind. Its action cannot be controlled, nor its results foreseen, except the certainty that it will die when the occasion is over.

The process of self-deception under these circumstances is easy. A careless sinner, ignorant of the Bible, comes under the influence of a protracted meeting. His fears and hopes are addressed by considerations appealing to his desire of happiness and dread of misery. He is told that conversion is a simple preference of God to the world, of heaven

to hell; a preference as easy to be made by any one present as the choice to go home when the meeting is ended. He is alarmed, distressed, melted down; his sympathies are excited by seeing others go to the seat of the anxious and of the converts. He feels as he never felt before, and asks himself if this must not be conversion. This is the perilous and awful moment when he needs a spiritual guide to say, "Take care of your soul. Bow immediately at the foot of the cross. Delay for a moment may be your eternal undoing. Watch and pray, and search your own heart. But be not forward to hope that you are a convert now. If you are, the work of salvation will go on in your heart, and in the fruits of holiness will bring to yourself and others the comforts of a good hope in your case. If you are not a convert now, and yet entertain a hope, the probability is that you will die a self-deceiver." So the great luminaries of past revivals have treated men in these circumstances.

But it is said, "Some pledge, given in the face of a public assembly, is necessary to bring the halting to a decision." To this point only a moment can be devoted. Meetings for the anxious, that appropriate instructions may be given them, are eminently proper. These, I think, should be appointed in public, and attended always by pastors and experienced elders,

without any thing of display and exhibition. But, much as I respect the judgment and motives of excellent men who think otherwise, the public designation of the anxious in an assembly, and the whole machinery of "anxious seats," as they are called, seem to me at least liable to so much abuse as to be generally inexpedient. And as to the same procedure respecting "converts," my whole judgment and heart revolt against it.

2. To the church there are serious dangers in these premature hopes, especially when combined with premature profession of religion.

This topic of itself demands a treatise, but I must confine myself to those suggestions which appear to me most practical at the present time. The prominent point for apprehension is, that the spirituality of the church will be gradually undermined by the admission of unconverted members.

In the first place,—there has of late been an evident tendency, in the course of revival measures, to reckon up and to publish, as early as possible, the number of converts, and of additions to the church. Pious and zealous ministers mean by this to do honor to divine grace. But let them ask if there is no mixture of religious ostentation in this "numbering of the people;" and ask also if there is no sectarian policy connected with it. Sixty hopeful

subjects of grace are reckoned among my people this week. If they are not admitted together into my church very soon, many of them will probably unite with the church of brother A., and others go to different denominations. They must be secured therefore without delay.

In the second place, — it is by no means probable that the ultimate prosperity of a church will be promoted by this hasty accession to its list of communicants. The strength of a church consists not in the number, but in the character, of those who belong to it. On this principle, when Gideon had mustered all his soldiers for the war with Midian and Amalek, presuming that all would be few enough to encounter so mighty a host, “The Lord said unto him, the people that are with thee are too many.” Any skilful commander, if called to storm a fortification, would choose to rely on a select band of soldiers, known to possess true hearts and tried courage, instead of ten times their number of recent and promiscuous volunteers. And why should a principle, sanctioned by experience in all ordinary concerns, be discarded in religion? Paradox as it may seem to youthful ministers, of many a church it may be said, as to all the purposes of unity and stability and moral strength, “The people are too many.” For I am prepared to say now,



In the third place, — that they who rush into the church without piety, not only add nothing to its strength, but in various ways paralyze its energies, and are a dead weight on its prosperity. To its doctrines it is not improbable that they will be found in one form or another opposed. If the pastor preaches the soul-abasing truths of the Bible with fidelity, these false professors are the men from whom he may expect an influence, secret or open, to be arrayed against him. They have never been at heart reconciled to these truths. A man who had long been a professor of religion, though not of my pastoral charge, once came to tell me his dissatisfaction with the sermon which he heard me preach on the preceding Sabbath. “So,” said I, “it seems you are not pleased with the doctrine of election?” — (which was the subject of my discourse). “No, certainly I am not.” “What then did you think of my text? And what do you think of the ninth chapter of Romans, from which my text was taken?” “Indeed, sir, to be honest, I have always thought that the Bible would have been quite as good a book without that chapter as with it.” Who can be assured that one half the members of a church may not be of this description, if they are hurried into its communion without having been instructed in the first principles of religion before or after their supposed conversion?

And as to the duties of evangelical piety, what is to be expected of such men? Strangers to the spirit of vital godliness, will they hold up their pastor's hands? Will they actively sustain the prayer-meeting and the Sabbath school? Will they devoutly maintain family worship, and train up their households for God?

As to the discipline of the church, what is to be expected? The indispensable importance of this to the prosperity of religion all experience testifies; and the intrinsic difficulties attending it are equally apparent. But how is discipline to be maintained in a church, without a predominant spirit of piety in its members? An individual is arraigned for open, perhaps habitual, violation of the laws of Christ. He is obstinate in self-justification. Others sympathize with him and take his part; prejudices are excited; parties are formed; a struggle for influence commences; and clamor and wrath, and all the mischiefs that result from baleful passions blown into angry commotion ensue. Plainly, a church cannot prosper without discipline; and discipline it cannot maintain, when one half or one third of its members choose to have none.

To what purpose is it then to say, "Keep the door of the church wide open, and if unworthy men enter, cast them out?" At the best, I admit the

impossibility of wholly excluding such men; for, with all the vigilance of the apostles in their day, "False brethren crept in unawares." But it is easier to keep out ten such men than to cast out one.

And as to the character of the church, and its sanctifying influence on the world, what is to be expected from a lax system of admission to membership? How is she to be the light of the world, when the light in herself is darkness? Her unconverted members are the elements of death in her bosom even if they maintain a blameless exterior. But generally they will not do this. Towards many of them ungodly opposers of experimental piety will point the finger of reproach, and say, "There are your converts, — as worldly, as proud, as light-minded, as indifferent to religion as other people." What is the reply? Can the church contradict what she knows to be unquestionable facts? Will it do for her to say, "These men are doubtless false professors, and the peril be on themselves; — it is no concern of the church?" It will not do to say this. It is a solemn concern of the church to maintain its own holy character as a community instituted by God to train men for heaven, and not for perdition. She is pledged to do this by most sacred vows; and the world holds her to that pledge; and God holds her to it. When Achan committed his trespass secretly,

the indictment of heaven was laid in against the whole religious community to which he belonged: "Israel hath sinned." Divine wrath rested on the church as a body for the transgression of a single member, till he was searched out and punished. Nor is it less true now that the tolerated sin of one member is the sin of the church.

What, then, if we heedlessly admit to our fellowship, and continue in it, unconverted men, what hope can we entertain that God will bless us? If any considerable proportion of our communicants should be of this character, what is to become of our genuine revivals? Let the Spirit of God be withdrawn from us, and leave us to fanatical excitements and human contrivances to multiply nominal Christians, and then, indeed, we may have "human converts," and many accessions to the numbers of the church, but the glory of our Zion will be departed; and a few such seasons of ingathering in any church will be sufficient to render it an utter desolation.

There are two other points, which deserve more extended notice than I can give them under this head. One is the authority of apostolic precedent, as alleged in favor of sudden admissions to the church. Without spending time to controvert the premises often assumed in regard to this matter, I will barely say, that, as to any number of individ-

uals who have recently professed religion, let me be assured, on divine authority (as I am, for example, respecting the Pentecost converts), that they “believed,” — that “the Lord added them to the church,” — that they “continue in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship,” — and that “they shall be saved;” let me have this assurance, and I can have no apprehension that any mistake has been committed. But who will undertake to give me this assurance?

The other point respects the loud note of warning to Christians of this time from a well-known apostasy, which occurred in the New England churches during the last century. By a gradual and silent progress the spirit of vital godliness was supplanted in many of these churches; in pulpits which had been occupied by the Mathers and Shepards of former days, laxity of doctrine was introduced, the glory of the Gospel was obscured, the real divinity of the Saviour and the special agency of the Spirit were kept out of sight, then called in question, then denied; till at length a regular, organized apostasy from the faith of the Gospel threw off its disguise, and boldly unfurled the standard of error. This lamentable defection among the sons of the Pilgrims, which many generations cannot remedy, did not result from accident. Whence did it come? The answer deserves to be proclaimed with trumpet tongue: The

Puritan churches slept, and the enemy sowed tares. Unconverted men, in great numbers, were admitted to their fellowship, hoping to become Christians. If I do not mistake the signs of the times, the danger of our churches now is, that unconverted men in great numbers will be admitted to their fellowship, hoping that they are Christians. Should this apprehension prove wellgrounded, another century will disclose the calamitous results. God grant that it may prove without foundation.

It will be evident, I presume, that, in the foregoing remarks, my eye has been fixed on the single danger of rash and premature admissions to the church. Justice to my own views, however, requires me to say, that there is an opposite danger to be guarded against, namely, too much delay in bringing hopeful converts to a public profession of religion. That this mistake has often been committed in our evangelical churches cannot be doubted. The consequences of this undue delay are such as a judicious minister will most certainly perceive, at least after a few years of pastoral experience, and of careful attention to the spiritual state of individuals who need his special guidance. The most general usage of New England churches (with many exceptions, of course, to meet particular cases), I suppose has been to delay admission of candidates after hopeful

conversion from two months to six. Within the last fifteen years, probably the time has not generally exceeded from two to four months.

Did my limits allow, this would be a proper place to sketch out a plan for the systematic instruction and probation of recent converts between the period of hope and profession; a plan by which they might be kept in a state of trial and of progress, without the liability to be carried backward in their course by adverse circumstances. Should it please God to continue the glorious effusions of his Spirit, by which our country has been so signally favored of late years, some system of this sort will probably be deemed indispensable in our churches. At this moment I can only recommend to your careful examination some very lucid and judicious remarks, which you will find under the head of "The Probationer's Class," — *Spirit of the Pilgrims*, Vol. IV. p. 656.

## LETTER VII.

GENTLEMEN,— Not having had room in my last to say all I wished by way of remark on the historical sketch of facts and principles constituting the general subject of my Letters, I now subjoin my *fifth* and *last* general remark, which is, that Christian preachers, who wish their ministrations to be blessed of God for the promotion of revivals, ought correctly to understand and represent the subject of Divine influence in the conversion of sinners.

This is a point concerning which God is jealous of his own prerogatives. The sanctification of the human heart is so eminently the special work of his Spirit, that the minister who denies or but half believes the truth on this subject, or who substitutes for it some theory more flattering to human pride, is destined to labor amid spiritual barrenness. At any rate, he cannot see a genuine revival of religion as the proper fruit of his own labors. At all periods, indeed, individuals claiming to be Orthodox have entertained views more or less erroneous as to the



work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. But, for a long period, the faith of our Calvinistic churches, especially in New England, had been as much settled on this subject as on any other in religion; and it would be just as reasonable at this day to revive all the debates of past ages on the doctrine of justification or atonement as on this. A spirit of bold speculation, however, has arisen in our time, and advanced theories respecting regeneration, the same in substance as those which have been often refuted and abandoned heretofore, but which, being now advanced with the imposing air of novelty, are, in my opinion, dangerous to the interests of evangelical and experimental piety just so far as they are embraced.

Do you ask me to specify what I mean? It is reasonable that you should wish this; and I will endeavor to do it with as much clearness and brevity as I am able.

One theory, then, to which I refer, is that which denies any direct divine influence in regeneration, and ascribes the change wholly to moral suasion. This is an old error revived. It was familiar to my earliest theological studies; and through my whole ministry, though this sentiment has never had a single respectable advocate till lately, the reasons why I have thought it an error, and a serious one, have been the same that I shall now state.

How does God operate on minds? Whatever range we may give to our speculations, I suppose all must come to this result, that it must be done by an influence either mediate or immediate, and that no mode of influence besides these two is conceivable.

By mediate influence we mean that which attends the employment of second causes, operating according to the settled laws of mind; as where instruction removes ignorance, argument produces conviction, and eloquence awakens emotion. There is a philosophical sense, in which the action of second causes on intelligent beings is properly ascribed to God; just as we say he governs the animal, vegetable, and planetary worlds by laws appropriate to each.

By immediate influence we mean that which is direct, without the intervention of second causes. Calvinistic preachers have always ascribed the renovation of a sinner in the large sense to both these kinds of divine influence. When they speak of conversion as including the Christian graces, or denoting the commencement and progress of holiness in the heart, they refer to the direct agency of the Holy Spirit, and also to the instrumentality of means. But when they speak of regeneration as denoting merely the commencement of sanctification, and as being an instantaneous, not a progressive, work, it is the immediate agency of God, and that only, to which they refer.

You must be well aware that there are religious teachers now, of considerable name, who boldly aver that God does not, and cannot, exert any other influence on the heart of a sinner than the mediate kind, which consists in the power of motives. A popular preacher has been accustomed to use language like the following: "In renewing men, the Spirit employs means. He does not come and take right hold of the heart and perform an operation upon it; but he presents motives; he persuades by means of truth, and the heart is overcome." — "To change men's hearts requires only the presentation of truth by the Spirit of God. His influence differs not at all from that of the preacher, except in degree." Doubtless you have heard the sentiment maintained in the pulpit, or seen it in theological discussions, that "the Spirit of God changes the sinner's heart, just as we change a man's purpose in any case by persuasion; and that any direct influence distinct from moral suasion would be inconsistent with the laws of moral agency.

To this theory I object, in the first place, that it contradicts the plain declarations of the Bible. Not a twentieth part of the evidence on which I make this statement can be or need be adduced here. "Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken by Paul." Ask

any plain Christian to interpret this, and he will tell you here was a direct divine influence on the heart of Lydia, not only distinct from the influence of means, but expressly preparatory to the access of this influence. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will." How is this? Suppose some one should ask, "Does the Lord come, and take right hold of the king's heart?" Yes, doubtless, for it is "in his hand." Let such as feel a difficulty in this language, search for an interpretation. If there is a difficulty, common sense did not create it, and need not stop to explain it. But if illustration were needed, it might be found in one simple case of fact. Nehemiah prayed, with great importunity and perseverance, that the king of Babylon's heart might be "turned" to favor the rebuilding of Jerusalem. That heart was barricaded by policy, pride, and prejudice against the enterprise. But while no "moral suasion" was brought to bear upon it, from argument and motives, or even from a knowledge of Nehemiah's prayers having been offered, it was effectually "turned," in answer to those prayers, by an invisible influence from heaven.

"God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts." How did God produce light? By the agency of Gabriel, or the

instrumentality of other second causes? No, but by the immediate energy of his own word, "Let there be light." So in regeneration, he shines in our hearts: "Let there be love to God." Call this moral suasion, and what becomes of Paul's analogy, in which consists the whole significance of his language? Was light persuaded into existence at the beginning? Paul preached to the Corinthian converts; but the light that shined in their hearts was an immediate influence of the Holy Spirit.

"Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." How was Isaiah moved in uttering predictions of the Messiah? Certainly by a direct influence of the Holy Ghost, not by moral suasion. True, the kind of influence in this case was very different from that employed in regeneration; but it shows that immediate access to a human mind is not impossible to Him who made it, nor inconsistent with the laws of moral agency. Again, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, to will and to do, of his good pleasure." How does God work in men's hearts to produce holy volition and action? The theory says, by motives; "just as one man's mind is influenced in any case by the persuasion of another." But unperverted Christian experience says, "An immediate divine influence is superadded to the motives of the Gospel."

I object to the theory of moral suasion, in the second place, because it subverts the scriptural doctrine of depravity. The question is, have the light and motives of the Gospel, when exhibited to the sinner, the same power to change his heart that argument has to influence his judgment in common cases? Suppose you state to him the common argument to prove the existence of God. He is an intelligent man; he sees the force of that argument fully; his understanding is convinced. But suppose you proceed and set before this same man, with equal clearness, the moral character of God; do you, by the same process, bring him to love it? If so, his opposition to God before was not to his true character; it was founded in mistake. All he needed was intellectual light to correct his false views of God, and then he was predisposed to love him; for opposition to every false character of God denotes a right, and not a criminal, state of heart.

Now this is not such a sinner as the Bible anywhere describes. Paul speaks of men who were opposed to God, not merely by intellectual mistake, but "their understanding was darkened, because of the blindness of their heart." The Jews rejected the Messiah, not because the means of moral suasion were wanting, but in using these means "the veil was on their hearts." And Christ speaks of them,

not as predisposed to love the true character of God, if they had only been instructed so as to see it; "Ye have both seen and hated both me and my Father." The doctrine of Christ, as to the guilt of men, is, that they have light enough, but love darkness. The theory of moral suasion is, that they have no love of darkness, but such as light and motives will remove.

I object, in the third place, to this theory, because it subverts the scriptural doctrine of special grace.

"In regeneration," it has been said, "the sinner's heart is changed by the influence of truth and motives presented by God; just as one man's mind is changed in any case by the persuasion of another." How does the orator persuade his hearers? By appeals to their understanding, conscience, passions, interest, &c.; that is, by addressing principles that are in the men already, — principles that are in all men. He operates on their minds by an objective influence; by the presentation of external motives, adapted to sway their purpose. This is all he can do. But is this all God can do? He addresses men by the solemn motives of the Gospel, through preaching, and other modes of presenting external means of persuasion. But is this all that he can do? Certainly not; for besides the presentation of motives through the instrumentality of second causes, he

can exert an immediate influence on minds, such as no man has the power of exerting on another man; and this is the influence which he does exert in regeneration. To deny this is to deny special grace. For if regeneration is produced by an influence the same as that employed by one man on the mind of another in common persuasion, certainly it is not in any sense a supernatural work. It takes place according to the laws of nature, in the ordinary course of cause and effect.

Why, then, is one sinner in an assembly regenerated, rather than others, who possess the same powers and principles of moral agency as he? An event occurs in this case, for which, according to the theory in question, there is no reason. A hundred men, of essentially the same intelligence and moral character, listen to the same sermon. God addresses them all by the voice of the preacher; but only one of the hundred is savingly renewed, and he by just the same influence which is applied to all the rest without effect! On the theory of special grace, a good reason (namely, the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit) is to be assigned for this difference of result; but on the theory of moral suasion it is absolutely without any reason.

The scriptural representations of Christians as "begotten through the Gospel," and "born again by



the word of God," are in no measure inconsistent with the doctrine of immediate divine influence on the heart. God wrought miracles "by the rod of Moses," and "by the hand of Paul;" but the instrumentality employed surely did not supersede his own supernatural agency.

But it has been said, "The power of God which creates and governs matter is a very different thing from that which is applied to minds. One is physical, the other can operate only through moral suasion." It is very true that the laws of matter are different from those of mind; but it does not follow that the power of God by which different effects are produced must be of different kinds, according to the nature of those effects. "Are we to conceive that the power proper to create inanimate matter could never create a thinking mind!—that angels and the souls of men were persuaded into being by arguments and motives; and that the material world was forced out of nothing by the power of attraction!"\*

Great perplexity has arisen in recent discussions as to divine influence from a very indefinite use of the term physical; and from the assumption that a direct agency of God upon the heart in regeneration must be a physical operation. The power of one

\* Smalley.

man to influence the mind of another man is solely of the mediate kind, through motives. But it is neither becoming nor logical to infer, as some have done, that the power of God is restricted in the same manner. His access to the heart may be immediate, and in regeneration must be so. The change in this case is moral; it is wrought in a moral agent; the effects produced are moral effects. But the power producing the change, or the work itself, is not moral, — it is not physical, but supernatural.

I know that there are good and respectable men who have adopted the theory of moral suasion, and still do not mean to deny special grace. This latter doctrine they find sanctioned by the whole current of the Bible and of Christian experience. Hence they attempt to make out a complex theory; and seem to maintain, that, besides the moral power of motives (such as the orator brings to bear on his hearers), there is superadded, in the regeneration of a sinner, a divine influence on his heart, which still is not a direct influence. What is it, then? Not a mediate influence, through the power of truth and motives. Not an immediate influence on the heart. What is this influence? Not a few, I apprehend, who have begun to slide downward from the faith of our Calvinistic churches, but who have been ac-

customed to use the current language of Orthodoxy as to divine influence, and verily suppose that they mean what this language imports, — if they would look carefully at the ground on which they stand, must be convinced that their favorite theory of moral suasion, and the doctrine of special supernatural influence in regeneration, cannot both be true. I have spoken thus freely because I regard all speculations which tend to exalt human instrumentality and diminish a humble reliance on God as fundamentally erroneous, and fatal to the spirit of genuine revivals.

Another topic which I would class under the general head of incorrect views concerning divine influence is the theory which amounts to regeneration by self-love.

Paul says, “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” He did not mean against an imaginary and false character of God, such as ought to be hated; but against his true character. How is this enmity to be removed? Paul says, by such a change in the “carnal mind,” that it shall love holiness, and become “reconciled to God,” as he is; in other words, by bringing up the human heart to the standard of the Bible. Another mode of removing this enmity is to bring down the character of God by such a modification of his attributes that the “en-

mity" of the carnal mind towards it shall cease, without any radical change (in this mind); that is, with no change but such as will spontaneously occur in the sinner from a change in his views as to the relations and feelings of God towards himself. It was by appealing to the principle of self-love, and a correspondent modification of the Gospel, that the Romish missionaries in Eastern Asia seemed likely to convert the whole heathen world. But after a fair experiment it turned out that the converts were no better men than before; because "it was one thing to christianize heathen, and quite another thing to humanize and heathenize Christianity."

Paley resolved virtue into "doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God, for the sake of everlasting happiness." Bolingbroke, and the school of infidels to which he belonged, maintained that the "chief principle of action in every man must be regard to his own interest." The same sentiment has been, at different periods, maintained by theologians professedly of the Arminian as well as of the Antinomian school. But it has been a subject of no small surprise to many, that the following statement should be made by a professed Calvinist at this day: "This self-love, or desire of happiness, is the primary cause or reason of all acts of preference or choice which fix supremely on any object."

Again: The being constituted with a capacity for happiness desires to be happy; and knowing that he is capable of deriving happiness from different objects, considers from which the greatest happiness may be derived, and as in this respect he judges or estimates their relative value, so he chooses or prefers the one or the other as his chief good. Again, the feelings of the sinner under the influence of self-love are represented during a process adapted to excite intense interest, till at last, — “he is willing to fix, and does in fact fix, the eye of contemplation upon the object of holy affection, and does, with such glimpses of its glories as he may obtain, feel their attractions, and summon his heart to that love of God his Saviour which is the only condition of his mercy.”

This language certainly is not so precise as one could wish; but it seems unavoidable to understand it as meaning: “That regard to his own happiness is the primary and proper spring of action in every man; that his moral character is determined solely by the object of his choice, or his estimate of his own interest, as correct or incorrect; that if he chooses the world as his chief good from self-love, he is an unholy man; but if he chooses God from self-love, he is a regenerate man.” And by that voluntary act in which he first prefers God to the world

from regard to his own interest, he becomes regenerate.

Now I have always supposed, that, where a man chooses one thing for the sake of another, as when he "eats or drinks for the glory of God," the latter is the chief, and the other a subordinate, object of regard. In some cases the subordinate is not chosen at all for its own sake, as where a bitter drug, or the amputation of a limb, is chosen to save life. At the most, therefore, if he who loves God does so with an ultimate regard to his own happiness; and if he "who chooses the happiness of others does so for the happiness he expects in seeing others happy" (as the above-mentioned writer believes); he makes God and his neighbor the secondary, and himself the primary and chief, object of his regard.

What, then, is the standard of duty? We have been accustomed to answer, the divine law. What does this require? "Thou shalt love" (not *thyself*, but) "the *Lord thy God*, with all thy heart." Say that I exercise love to God, not because he requires it, not because he deserves it, but from the same motive as that with which I have loved wealth or worldly honor, namely, a desire of my own happiness, will God allow it, will common sense allow it, to be a fulfilment of this great command? Plainly, this would be to fix my supreme love, not on God, but on myself.

But is it the object, or is it the motive, of a voluntary affection, that determines its character? Its motive certainly. This is coincident with its supreme object, but not with its subordinate. I might choose to be burnt at the stake; but who could say whether this subordinate choice is holy or sinful, without knowing the ulterior motive; whether it is to get honor to myself, or to do honor to Christ? So if I choose God, the state of my heart is determined by the governing motive; is it because I love his holy character? Then my choice is holy. Is it because he can make me happy? The ultimate regard of my heart (my motive) is not to God, but myself.

But is it wrong for me to regard my own interest? No,—I am commanded to do it by Him who made me the special guardian of my own life and happiness; and required of me duties to my own soul, and my immediate connections, which no one else can perform. But my self-love must be regulated by a proper regard to God, and the interests of the universe; and of course must not be the “primary cause” of my moral preferences; it must not exalt myself above the creation around me, and the Creator too.

Any man may use language so as not to express his own meaning. But deliberately to admit that

self-love must be the primary ground of moral affection is to supersede all intelligent discussion about regeneration, or any of the kindred doctrines of grace. This one principle sweeps the whole away. There remains no radical distinction of character between the saint and the sinner. The most depraved individual on earth, or even among apostate spirits, doubtless, is the centre of his own affections. And though he may have perverted views of what is his real interest, he means notwithstanding to act, and does act, from a "primary" regard to himself. And if this is the highest principle of action of a holy being, then an angel and a devil stand on the same ground as to moral character;—(in other words) there is no distinction between holiness or sin.

Besides, this theory would split the moral system into as many jarring parts, with as many centres of "primary" affection, as it contains individuals. It would set every moral agent at variance with every other moral agent, and with God himself. Whereas, the simple precept, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," sets up another standard in every bosom. It establishes a common centre of moral affection to the universe of moral agents; and binds the hearts of all to each other and to the throne of Jehovah.



I intended to analyze the "self-love theory" in its practical bearings on revivals, and its tendency to subvert all correct views as to special divine influence. I intended to show how easy it is for a man who has been thoroughly alarmed with fears of hell to become persuaded that God is his friend, and will make him happy; and thus to feel that he loves God, when no spiritual change whatever has taken place in his heart. I intended to show how easy it is for such a man to mistake his "love of happiness," and his choice of heaven for conversion, while he has no "love of holiness." But I must forbear to extend these remarks.

You will perceive, gentlemen, that, in giving you my thoughts on so many points of prominent importance in this day of revivals, I have been drawn into a train of observations which could not well be restricted to narrow limits. Still, there is one more head of remark, under which I will call your attention to a few things in our theological and pulpit phraseology, which I fear tend to obscure, if not to subvert, the scriptural doctrine of special divine influence.

Probably there is some significance in the fact, that many preachers of the younger class often mention in their sermons repentance, conversion, &c., while they rarely, if ever, use the word regeneration.

They consider these words, however, as synonymous, though the authority of biblical and of theological usage decide otherwise. It is agreed on all hands, that the sinner is under immediate obligation to love God and repent; and that the only obstacle to his doing this is his supreme love of sin. Now when this obstacle is removed, and the love of God begins in his heart, by what agency does it begin? Is it his own agency, or that of God, in which the change originates? The Bible ascribes it to God, and the change it calls regeneration; distinguishing by this term that beginning of holy affection in the heart by divine influence, from the contrivance and development of holy affection, under the same influence, which it calls conversion, sanctification, &c. Hence we say, as the Bible does, concerning a man who repented;—but the Bible never teaches us to say, and we never presume to say, “he regenerated himself.” The words are no more exactly synonymous in Christian experience than in technical theology. To illustrate my meaning by an analogy which is certainly imperfect (as analogies must be on this subject), in the call, “Lazarus, come forth,”—the voice, the reanimating influence, was of God;—the rising and coming forth was the act of Lazarus. Substantially the same difference exists between regeneration and repentance. Regeneration, the work

of God on the heart, is done but once; repentance is needed daily. God's breathing into Adam the breath of life, so that he became a living soul, was done but once; Adam's breathing and living was a continuous exercise of his vital functions. Man is created but once, born but once, but lives and walks daily. The Christian is "created anew" and "born again" but once, but repents every day of his life.

The practical bearing of these remarks is this: some preachers speak of the sinner's "conversion," "making himself a new heart," &c. (for regeneration, as I said, is a term they avoid) by a formal act of his own will, resolving to do it. Accordingly, conversion is put on a footing with any common transaction in which a man changes his mind. And the representations of a change of heart as being a great and serious and difficult thing are treated with an air of flippant severity sometimes approaching to profaneness. But this loose, indefinite mode of describing conversion, be the preacher's motive ever so good, is certainly liable to great and dangerous misapprehension. Regeneration, in its grave and scriptural import, may be synonymous with conversion, but not with conversion as thus described. It is holiness and heaven begun in the soul by the Spirit of God. No regenerate man will be lost. But a man may be converted from Mahometanism to Christian-

ity, and be lost. He may be converted from Unitarianism to Calvinism, and be lost; — converted from levity to thoughtfulness, and from thoughtfulness to deep anxiety, — and yet be lost. Nay, he may be converted from perfect indifference, or violent opposition, to the Gospel, into a joyful believer that he is an heir of salvation, and yet be lost.

Now when I hear a sinner told from the pulpit that “conversion is a mere volition, — a mere making up of his mind to embrace religion, — that the change of his heart is wholly an affair of his own will,” &c., I am not sure that the sentiment intended to be taught is wrong; but I am quite sure that the practical tendency of such language is to mislead this sinner as to his dependence on the Holy Spirit, and to cherish in him a presumptuous reliance on himself. Especially is it so, when, to give prominence to his own voluntary agency in his conversion, the change of heart is represented as a thing perfectly easy to himself, but entirely beyond the reach of omnipotence, except as effected by the spontaneous movement of his own will; God being unable to control his moral exercises consistently with his freedom as a moral agent. Edwards, speaking of views similar to these, says: “Thus our own holiness is from ourselves as its determining cause, and its original and highest source. Man is not depend-

ent on God, but God is rather dependent on man, in this affair ; for he only operates consequently in acts in which he depends on what he sees we determine and do first. What can more effectually encourage the sinner in present delays and neglects, and embolden him to go on in sin, in a presumption of having his own salvation at all times at his command? ”

When it is said, “it is as easy for a sinner to repent as to remain impenitent,” the meaning may be right, but the language is not proper for the pulpit. There is no difficulty for a man to choose that to which his whole heart is inclined ; but is it as easy for him to counteract all the moral habits, affections, and inclinations of his heart as to comply with these ? The doctrine of free agency is to be maintained by appeals to consciousness, experience, and common sense ; not to absurdity. Gabriel is a free agent ; but who would think it proper to illustrate his free agency by affirming that “it is as easy for him to blaspheme God as to praise him ? ”

As to the expression which represents conversion as consisting in “the sinner’s making up his mind to serve God,” — though the preacher’s meaning may be correct (as it certainly may be), — the effect is that of a colloquial caricature of a sacred scriptural truth. I mean that such is the effect, when this and

other forms of expression are so employed as virtually to leave out of view the Holy Spirit, and reduce the sinner's moral renovation to the familiar level of an ordinary transaction. During those revivals which I have described in the foregoing pages, a certain minister, in a sermon on the new birth, summed up his statement of the doctrine thus: "All I know concerning regeneration is, for one to draw up strong resolutions to keep the commandments of God." This man was an avowed disbeliever in special, divine influence. At that day no one anticipated, that, in thirty years, substantially the same language would be employed by "revival preachers" to describe a change of heart.

The ample scope given to my remarks in the foregoing letters has arisen from a deep conviction that the doctrines of grace embraced by our pilgrim fathers, and regarded as fundamental in the churches which they established, must owe their preservation and perpetuity amongst us in no small degree to the influence of Christian ministers. Just so far as these doctrines are modified from a love of philosophical theories, or from conformity to a vitiated taste, the sanctifying influences of the Spirit will forsake our churches, and our ministrations will cease to be the power of God unto salvation to perishing souls. All who wish to see an uncorrupted Christianity handed

down to coming generations should guard against open attacks on its vital truths, and against equivocal forms of expression, by which the simplicity and power of these truths may be obscured and gradually subverted.

I must, however, add one caution in closing these Letters. While it has been my object to call your attention to several things which I think doubtful, and to others which I think decidedly wrong, in modes of preaching and conducting revivals, I would by all means advise you to avoid that hesitating and paralyzing apprehension which leads a minister to be so much afraid of being wrong as to do nothing. Under God, the ministers of the nineteenth century have a mighty work to accomplish. Our own vast country is to be brought under the influence of the Gospel. The wide world is to be evangelized. The day of slumber is passed. The sacramental host of God's elect are marshalled in arms, and wait for ministers to lead them on to victory. Gird on your armor, then, soldiers of the cross! The Captain of salvation heads the van, having on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, *King of Kings and Lord of Lords!* He has gone forth in the triumphs of his grace, conquering and to conquer. Stubborn hearts, in numbers unexampled, bow before the all-subduing influences of his Spirit. From the east

and west, from the north and south, glad voices are heard to mingle in songs of salvation. "Awake, O Zion, put on thy strength!" — "Arise, shine, for thy light is come; and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!" The great battle of God Almighty will succeed these wonderful effusions of his Spirit. Wo to those inhabitants of the earth who shall withstand all the overtures of the Redeemer's mercy, and be found at last among the incorrigible despisers of his grace! — whom the Lord will destroy with the breath of his mouth and the brightness of his coming!

Affectionately yours, &c.

E. PORTER.













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